ENGLISH STUDIES IN AFRICA

olume 2 September, 1959 Number 2

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JOHANNESBURG

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Publishers' and Booksellers' advertisements will be accepted at the following rates:
Full page ... £6/-/- Half page ... £3/3/-

Subscriptions, at the rate of 10s. 0d. per annum are payable to:

The Witwatersrand University Press,
Milner Park,
Johannesburg.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL IN AFRIKAANS

ALAN PATON

It is the general conclusion in English-speaking literary circles that the Afrikaans novel is in a decline. Why should this be so? The question is doubly worth asking in this year of the celebration of the "Wonder of Afrikaans." One thing is certain, the blame cannot be laid at the door of Afrikaans. The Afrikaner novelist has to hand a nutty, fluent, resourceful, and vigorous language, that can communicate any thought, convey any emotion, say anything that one wishes to say about our exciting, turbulent, anxious life. What has the Afrikaner poet that the Afrikaner novelist has not?

If there is nothing lacking in the language, where does the trouble lie? Surely not in the lack of those talents and skills that writers are said to command. One could hardly suppose that the Afrikaans-speaking people are less capable than the English-speaking of producing writers. The tools are there, the skills are there. Is there a psychological blockage of some sort? The repressed fear of hostile literary criticism is said to be a powerful inhibitory factor. Is it not possible that the fear of hostile social criticism is equally inhibitory? And is that not perhaps the greatest contributory cause of the decline of the Afrikaans novel?

One approaches this question with some diffidence, for in a country so full of sensitivity, the critic is likely to be accused of a political, even a racial, motive for his criticism. What is more, I have up till now steadfastly refused to criticize the work of fellow novelists, because I believe that such criticism is inevitably made valueless by the importing of the most discreditable personal motives. However, I have this justification, that I am in the main not concerned to judge individual novelists; it is the failure of the group that I am endeavouring to understand.

* * *

It is deep in the Afrikaner's soul to cherish "one's own." It would be hard to name a racial group in the entire world where the "own" is so fiercely cherished. It is one's own that is holy, it is only one's own that can really be known; or should one rather not say, it is only by knowing one's own that one is able to enter into the life of mankind? Assimilation is permissible only when one is assimilating, not when one is being assimilated. Smuts's theory of Holism, the creation of greater and greater wholes, is anathema. The church must be one's own, the school must be one's own. Afrikaans religion and culture and education and politics are closely interwoven. The Afrikaner's highest religious values and his highest group values are synthesized in Christian-Nationalism.

And now, by the grace of Providence, one's "own" has come into its own. After struggle, defeat, and humiliation, the Afrikaner has achieved untrammelled power. This "own," so long cherished in powerlessness, must be entrenched in power. Because this "own" is good for one's own, and because it must be preserved in its purity, one must also entrench the "own" of others. Custom must become law, contact between one's "own" and others' "own" must be reduced to what is essential for their separate continuance. It must be the function of literature, the duty of politics and education, to enrich and strengthen this "ownness." Even religion must make its contribution; but the church is credited with some kind of autonomy, though this is never claimed in any extreme and uncompromising way.

What difficult problems this poses for the Afrikaner novelist! Dare he claim some kind of autonomy for his own art? One thing is certain, he will not do so publicly and provocatively. But will he be able to do it in the privacy of that room where he writes? I do not merely mean: will he be brave enough to do it? I mean also: will he be psychologically capable of it?

Would he not rather turn, if he is so gifted, to poetry? Because poetry has a secret language, not open to inspection. At least, not yet.

* * *

All story-tellers agree that story-telling has stern rules. They have been formulated by different people in different ways; but it is generally agreed that one cannot disobey them without destroying, or at least flawing, the story. For one thing, if one tells a story, that must be one's primary purpose. A novelist, as man, may have other purposes, but they must always be secondary, even when noble. He may wish to expose a social evil, to recall the world to religion, to immortalize a hero, to sing his people. But where one of his secondary purposes interferes with his purpose of telling a story, it must be ruthlessly struck down. The secondary purpose may even precede the first; but once the story is chosen, the telling of it becomes the primary and controlling duty. This seems to suggest that there is something *absolute* in the demands of this particular art, and this in fact is the belief of most story-tellers.

There is yet another sense in which these demands are absolute; it is what we may call a moral sense. There is a widely accepted descriptive definition of the novelist's craft (due to Arnold Bennett, if I remember aright) to the effect that the novelist observes life, that he is excited by it, that he wishes to communicate what he sees (and perhaps his excitement also) to others, and that he chooses the story as his vehicle. In other words he has assumed an obligation towards the truth which makes a second absolute demand on him.

This "truth" is of course the truth of life as he sees it, conveyed in the form of a story, and as free as possible from any other kind of judgement. This has been described as "holding up a mirror to society"; this metaphor is good in that it suggests the fearlessness and the objectivity of the good writer, but it is deficient in two ways. In the first place it minimizes the writer's own role as digester, selector, and interpreter. In the second place, it seems to suggest that "society" is the inevitable subject of a story. This obviously cannot be so; for if it were so, Afrikaans fiction, for example, would be robbed of a novel such as Hettie Smit's highly personal *Sy Kom Met Die Sekelmaan,* one of its fairest jewels.

Nevertheless, most of us would agree that while the novelist

himself or herself is under no obligation to paint a picture of society, and while he may incline to the highly personal and subjective, or to the romantic, or to the historical, or to the animal story, it is strange when no kind of picture of contemporary society at all is to be found in the novel at large. And that certainly appears to be true of the Afrikaans novel of to-day.

Two qualifications should immediately be made of this statement. The first is that the novelist can justify his choice of a particular slice of society as the one that he knows best; that C. M. van den Heever, for example, in his *Die Held,* instead of dealing with Johannesburg in the round, was justified in confining himself to the theme of the metamorphosis of the Afrikaner in the city, and of the erosion of the values of one's "own" under the influence of materialism and anglicization. It is natural that the serious novelist of the present should choose to write about what he knows best, and one could criticize no novelist on that account, except of course when he becomes tedious and repetitious.

The second qualification to be made of the statement is that *all* novelists writing in South Africa to-day must face many difficulties in writing of South Africa at large, and in seeing life whole. Therefore, when we demand of novelists that they should tell us about our times, and interpret and illumine them, we should remember that the policy of our rulers, framed in law and complemented by custom, to give each group its "own", and to eliminate inter-group-contact wherever possible, is a confining factor of the most important kind. Whether it can be overcome is yet to be seen; but quite clearly, to take one example alone, it would be made more difficult for a writer to create any non-white character with any degree of confidence, or to enter with any confidence into any of the non-white worlds. This difficulty is at the moment felt more by the Afrikaner writers than by others, for they face not only the mystery of the "other" but also the hostility of the "own". We may be approaching the point when the writing of such novels must be left to the officials, for any other person will only make a fool of himself. We may be approaching the day of a new kind of novel altogether, which, although it may not satisfy what literary

critics are left, will bear the stamp of authenticity. The masterpiece will no doubt be written by the Minister, who will have the advantage of the advice of high officials, versed in the way of thought and speech of others, and "acquainted with their reasonable wants and aspirations."

Of course, there may be a reply to the argument that the policy of our rulers is killing the novel by dividing up life into unknowable segments; the reply may be that that is exactly what contemporary life is like, and that the novelist is therefore compelled to paint it in the curious segmented way. In that case the novelist is engaged in killing the novel too. He is abstracting Afrikaner life from the whole in which it is placed; he is discussing, often with great sincerity, the problems of city life, but they are too much his "own" to have the universal character of literature. Who would know from his novels anything of the events that appear daily in our newspapers, and fill the minds of readers, Afrikaners as well as others, with fear and speculation?

I myself believe that it is possible, even within the limitations imposed by racial laws, which limitations are growing narrower, to write novels that are more universal in their character than those of contemporary Afrikaner novelists. Even these very limitations of the essence of our South African life, and even explicit rebellion against them, may make the stuff of a novel, and go to join the literature of protest; but clearly it is dangerous stuff to handle, for when the "own" is replaced by the protest against the "own" (in its extreme form, naturally), one is still struggling to obey two absolutes, though now, however, with some hope of success. A striking instance of this explicit rebellion is Jan Rabie's recent *Ons, Die Afgod*. In evaluating his novel, one is torn between a desire to see the Afrikaans novel liberated from the shackles of conformity and admiration for the courage of those who attempt it, and on the other hand one's obedience to the demands of the craft. *Ons, Die Afgod* suffers, I believe, from the paying of insufficient attention to these demands; yet the critic cannot confine himself to these considerations. Mr Rabie's novel has a literary significance quite

apart from this, in that it is implicitly calling for a reintegration of the Afrikaans novel and the reality in which it is placed.

* * *

I am not suggesting that there was a golden age of Afrikaans fiction, and that this came to a mysterious end; rather it was an infant that never grew up. But it was a promising child. Following a number of predecessors of largely historical interest came Jochem van Bruggen's *Ampie Die Natuurkind*; this was succeded by *Ampie Die Meisiekind,* and (less satisfactorily) by *Ampie Die Kind.* The first was published in 1924, and has so far not been surpassed, nor I think equalled. The story is simple and clear, the simple characters are drawn with skill, and in the case of Ampie and Annekie, with love, and the language is simple also, these three simplicities fusing in a work of art, well-nigh perfect. A similar tribute must be paid to that *"eenling"*, Hettie Smit's *Sy Kom Met Die Sekelmaan.* This story of a love-lost girl is a novel without doubt, though it also has the nature of a poem. Miss Smit said of it ten years later that it was like *"'n stout kind wat vir my uit die verte uitlag en tong uitsteek."* That may well be so; a writer is always shy of any poetic upwelling in prose, (good or bad, I might add), because it is always self-revelatory. But behind that was a true artist, expressing emotion with superb skill. What happened to her? Why did she not write again?

It was a simple age, I think, and it was brought to an end by Parliament's decision to enter the second World War by the side of Great Britain, a decision especially fateful in that it was taken so soon after the Voortrekker celebrations of 1938. I was then the principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, and most of the white members of my staff were Afrikaans-speaking. As clear as I was in my mind that Hitler was a danger to the freedom of mankind, so clear were most of them that the war had nothing to do with them, and their opposition went obviously deeper than any politics. The success of the pro-war party under Smuts cloaked the final resurgence of the "own", which in 1948 achieved the power it had so long struggled for. So the Afrikaans novelist, his people

having emerged from one kind of double loyalty, had from 1938 onwards to contend with another. He had to obey the demands of the "own" and the demands of his craft, in a way that had never been expected of his predecessors.

C. M. van den Heever was undoubtedly the most notable of the novelists who attempted to reconcile the demands of the "own" with the demands of the craft. His novel *Die Held* may be considered an example of this. Here he breaks away from the bucolic novel with its permissible lyricism, which belonged to the earlier untroubled age, and he attempts to "hold up the mirror" to the new society. He seems to have attempted a stricter form, learned, who knows, from *Anna Karenina,* and to have advanced his story with step-by-step precision. It is a touching story for any observer of the Afrikaner scene, the progressive advancement or deterioration, depending on the point of view, of the Afrikaner who, believing fiercely in his "own", encountered the materialistic world of the city. But the story does not take fire.

Willem van der Berg's *Reisigers Na Nêrens* deals with a cognate theme. He takes a Cape Town set, and with an impressive measure of objectivity, examines their sophisticated and pathetic lives. This story also does not take fire, and his truest art lies in his treatment of the love between Jannie and Julia, his letters to her having the quality of small masterpieces. Both van den Heever and van der Berg, as many other writers have done before them, see love as the only hope in man's predicament.

In both of these novels one sees the attempt, which must have been made with courage, to examine more objectively the Afrikaner scene, and one cannot withhold one's respect for it. But even when one has accepted the Afrikaner scene to be as valid for drama as any other, one is left astonished by the fact that the most important things in the drama get left out, with a consistency that is unfailing. Who thinks to write about Afrikaner power, which is the greatest fact of our present life? Who writes about the transformation of South African society by Afrikaner power? Who writes about the Afrikaner mission to regulate and order the lives of all other

people? Who writes about the resistance of other people to this power? Who sees the Afrikaner drama as a drama of Africa, or as the great questionmark that throws its shadow over us all? I shall be accused no doubt of wanting to see every Afrikaner novelist take to writing political novels slating the Government. But that is not my wish. All I want is that the Afrikaner novelist should look at South Africa, and interpret and illumine my life and times for me in his own Afrikaner way. It is not important for me that he should have some secondary purpose that I approve of; what is important for me is that he should have a primary purpose to which he is faithful, that of communicating his truth about the world we live in.

But this is what he seems to me not to be doing. Or if he is doing it, it is a truth I do not recognize. Both conclusions are most melancholy.

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AT YALE: SOME IMPRESSIONS

R. A. FOAKES

NEW HAVEN, a large industrial city, of about 175,000 people, squats on the Connecticut coast 75 miles from New York. The harbour is cluttered with factories and oil installations, and in the town centre one is never aware of the sea. At the centre is the famous New Haven Green, a large square of grass bisected by Temple Street, facing which are three old churches. On the east side of the Green are office blocks; the south side is occupied by shops and business premises; to the north town and gown converge, where the County Court House backs almost on to Timothy Dwight College; the west side is filled by the old campus of Yale. Here all the freshmen live for a year before moving to one of the ten colleges that lie beyond and to one side of it. Further out still are the Hall of Graduate Studies, the science laboratories, the medical school, and beyond these the town closes in again, stretching out into suburbia.

Yale has its own co-operative store, and close at hand are restaurants, laundries, barbers, bookshops, gramophone record and smart clothes stores, so that although the university is so near to the centre of New Haven, the student can live more or less within the campus, and need have little contact with the town; there is even a special post-office provided for him. He arrives in September, and apart from brief recesses at Thanksgiving towards the end of November, at Christmas, and in the Spring, he will work through two fourteen-week terms until the middle of the following May. After his first year, when he lives in buildings on the old campus, he will reside in a college until he graduates at the end of his fourth year.

Like Harvard, Yale has a collegiate system, but it does not resemble Oxbridge at all closely. A few years ago President Griswold made it clear that autonomy would not be granted to individual colleges, and, at the very time when the sons of the first college graduates (the colleges were established in 1930; the university is of course much older, founded in 1701) were arriving with a family allegiance to Pierson or Berkeley College, it was

decided that freshmen should lose the choice of college they had possessed, and be allocated via the I.B.M. machines in the Dean's office. This perhaps illustrates what seems to be a basic attitude in education there, one revealed further in the term used of undergraduates; they are called 'boys', not, as in Britain, 'men' or 'gentlemen'. A freshman is treated rather as a larger schoolboy, as immature and irresponsible academically, as incapable of working on his own except under constant pressure. Socially he may be aggressively mature, but, in his academic training, he is drilled, with constant quizzes, tests and grading on written work, into completing a necessary number of courses.

These courses he elects from a very wide choice in many subjects. Initially he is likely to spend much time on fairly elementary survey and introductory work, with some compulsory English composition. Later he will 'major' in one subject, which means that he will spend more class-hours on this than on his other studies. He may see little of a lecturer except in the classroom; a popular course may attract a vast enrolment — a Shakespeare course has drawn 250—usually because of the brilliance, wit, or fame of the man teaching, and not because of interest in that particular topic. In courses with a large attendance, the lecturer may farm out much or all of the constant grading and testing to graduate assistants.

The aim of this system is to turn most of Yale's 4,000 undergraduates, all male, into well-rounded men. A witty professor there coined a definition of the well-rounded Yale man: he is one who, when placed on the Merritt Parkway (a splendid double highway into New York) rolls to Wall Street. This points to another feature of Yale, that quite a proportion of the student body is there to acquire the right social *cachet;* a few years ago there used to be a type of student known as the 'Gentleman C', a boy who was too 'shoe', had invested his career too far in social affairs, fraternities, secret societies (these flourish at Yale), to permit himself to run out with a B grade. A 'C', like a fourth at Oxford, may be a sign of something else than failure.

At the same time, there is astonishingly little snobbery; half the undergraduates have reached Yale through some kind of scholarship, and many of them are there to work hard. The system caters primarily for the mediocre student, which is natural in a country where a high proportion of the population goes to university, and

special provision has to be made for the very good student, the top ten per cent. They are given some relief from the grind of ordinary courses, and have more specialized work. However, those who 'major' in English will still have studied comparatively little literature when they graduate.

The better students almost always go on to postgraduate study. There are 3,000, men and women, working for senior degrees, which include all degrees in law and medicine, but also a large number of M.A. and Ph.D. qualifications in the Arts. It is common for American students to change universities when they go on to work for a higher degree, and many postgraduate students reading English, including all the women, will have studied elsewhere. At this stage they begin to specialize in earnest, and, some of them, to think of a job in university teaching; they are more mature, and also much more dedicated to their studies — sometimes with a professional intensity—than the undergraduates. The atmosphere among the graduate students is different from that in the colleges, for they are more independent, scattered about in lodgings, except for those who find a place in the Hall of Graduate Studies or in the new women's hall of residence; in addition, some of them are married.

Yet it is the shape of the work for a first degree that conditions the nature of the courses for further degrees. An M.A. in English requires one year of residence, an elementary reading knowledge of French and German, and the passing with credit of four courses. For a Ph.D. three full years of study are needed, at least one of which must be spent in residence at Yale, together with an elementary reading knowledge of Latin, French and German. The candidate must take eight or nine courses, normally four in his or her first year, three in the second year. Not later than the beginning of the final year the candidate must pass an oral examination in English Literature since Chaucer and in major American authors; English Language may be substituted for part of this, and all candidates normally have to take one course in Old English, and one in the history of the language, or some related topic. Finally, a dissertation must be presented.

The English school offers a total of about 30 courses, but only twenty or so are available in any one year. These are conducted in two-hour seminars meeting weekly through the session. Sample

courses offered in 1958-9 are 'Poetic Traditions of the Renaissance'; 'The Augustan Age'; 'The Age of Wordsworth'; 'Twentieth-Century Literature'; 'Theories of Poetry'; 'History of the English Language, 1400 to the Present'. A frequent demand for reports is made of students, so that those in their first year might be presenting one every week at one of their seminars. Intensive work is normal, at a level rather above that of an honours course at an English university, and of a different kind. A Ph.D. is more or less essential for any aspirant to university teaching in the United States, and valuable in other careers, and the whole business of getting one is taken very seriously. As if to get into practice for the articles they hope to write later on, students cast their essays in a form suitable for publication in PMLA, complete with an array of footnotes. And they seemed to me, in a short experience of seminars, to take their instructors too seriously. It must be difficult for a student who has been treated as a 'boy' while an undergraduate, who begins to specialize as a postgraduate, and even then is kept firmly up to the mark, to take a line of argument opposed to that of his professor, especially if that professor is a famous man; and certainly it was an unusual student who differed very firmly from prescribed views. Some would carefully (or perhaps half-unconsciously?) echo a professor's favourite phrase in their own comments; if 'irony' was in vogue, they would find irony everywhere.

Possibly the very size of the English faculty helps to foster this situation. For, out of a staff of about 70, only about 18, all full professors or associate professors, teach at a graduate level; and many of these do little undergraduate teaching, especially of first and second year students. They tend to become a little awesome on their Olympian heights. They certainly comprise a formidable group of critics and scholars, whose work is outstanding in many fields, and strong nearly everywhere. The best-known perhaps are F. A. Pottle, now engaged on the Boswell papers; Cleanth Brooks, a leader of the New Criticism; Maynard Mack, an authority on Pope; Helge Kökeritz, who has provided a basic study of Shakespeare's pronunciation; W. K. Wimsatt, the distinguished critical theorist; and Louis Martz, a specialist on Renaissance poetry. The stimulus of men like these (it would be easy to name another half dozen) is bound to be valuable, and students are attracted to Yale by their reputation. But since they teach graduate

courses normally connected with, or directly upon, their particular interests, they tend to be regarded as authoritative, and students, sitting at the feet of the masters, take their doctrine often as ultimate truth.

A large number of assistant professors and instructors is employed to deal with undergraduate teaching, especially with the elementary courses in composition that are compulsory for freshmen, which are known as 'bonehead English'. These men are often exceptionally talented, and are attracted to Yale by its prestige and status as a scholarly university. Highly trained, the best products of the graduate schools, they find themselves released from the pressure of intensive advanced study, to teach elementary composition. And they have no security of tenure; most of the instructors will have to leave at the end of four years, and those promoted to become assistant professors may find that they are expendable after another three years. It is not surprising that the atmosphere among them is not very comfortable. Some instructors feel that they are in a world like that of a Kafka novel, that through mysterious channels reports on them are being made to a remote conclave, which will sit in judgement and decide who's in, who's out. A few apply themselves to what is euphemistically known as 'apple-polishing', and are suspected of winning easy promotion. The best treat the whole situation humorously, and take life easily.

At the same time, they may feel keenly a real stratification, that they are distanced from the senior professors, some of whom they hardly know. This stratification is emphasized by an accident of the college system; the senior professors are all fellows of one or other of the colleges, and have studies there for teaching purposes. A few bachelors live in college apartments, but most scatter to their homes at the end of the day, and dine in college only on one evening in the week, the Fellows' Night, when as many of the fellows as are able to come gather in the senior common room. They will often take lunch in college, but meet then other fellows, or sometimes students. Many of the junior staff, on the other hand, may not be fellows of colleges, and tend to meet for lunch in the university dining hall or a campus restaurant. In addition, the busy round of research, writing books and articles, supervising dissertations, and teaching, in which the professors are engaged makes large demands on their time, and they may not pay much

attention to their juniors.

So if the undergraduate system is geared to producing a 'well-rounded man', taking as its norm what one report described as a 'red-blooded American boy', the postgraduate school seems rather to be geared to turning out specialists moulded into academic shape in the pressure of weekly seminars. And the distance between undergraduate and postgraduate life is paralleled to some extent by a distance between junior and senior staff. Nevertheless, the final product of the graduate school can emerge as a man far better educated in many ways than his English counterpart; and the eminence of the senior staff is matched by the liveliness and real quality of the instructors and assistant professors.

The English school at Yale is, then, not easily described. There is no doubt of its quality, or of the intensity and seriousness of its courses at a postgraduate level. These are open to criticism as being too professionalized, preparatives for publication in scholarly journals, and as imposing too much on the student rather than encouraging free development. But they accomplish much, and the good American student will have had a breadth of cultural interest stimulated by his general work for his first degree. In any case, Yale is almost bound to stimulate in this way; it has one of the world's great libraries, possesses an excellent art gallery, and offers first-rate concerts during term time. The students run their own radio station, and the drama school and film societies are perpetually active. And if these do not suffice, New York is not much more than an hour away by a fast train. Altogether, Yale is a good place in which to work and to live, with its high graduate standards, its great range of talented and interesting teachers, and its own special, and always exciting atmosphere.

SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

JACK COPE

SHE halted under the arcade and stood there blindly staring out into the sunlight. She was black, or more nearly a dark dull earth-colour, a Mosotho girl, and her eyes were mindless and shallow, glittering in a blank stare.

People passed her in crowds, all moving in one direction, and she stood alone with her back to the shop window staring out and seeing nothing. She had come a long way and had stopped to gather herself against the pain that was killing her.

There was no time to lose and she wanted to move on. She had another eighteen miles to walk and every minute she delayed there was a greater likelihood that they would find her and take her back. But she stood there and it was no use thinking she could move a step until she fought down the pain and took firmer possession of herself. A big swathe of bandages enfolded her head, going under the chin, and her mouth was covered by a pad of cotton-wool lightly tied. From a cord round her neck hung a small oval medallion of the Virgin and Child. She breathed through wide quivering nostrils and her open eyes were turned in upon the one appalling spectacle of herself, of her fight for self-possession.

Her simple green blouse and black skirt were crumpled; she had pulled them on in a hurry and walked out of the hospital. At first the sheer terror of the escape had occupied her, the heavy slugging of her heart. The streets were drenched in sparkling sunshine and not a leaf stirred; the wind-frayed palms were still, smoke-plumes were going up softly from the power-station into a white sky. Women and young girls were everywhere in light frocks, the buildings white in the sunlight and the mountain carrying pockets of mauve haze in its kloofs. October, a Spring morning. The people stepped lightly, talking and laughing, moving aside to pass the slowly plodding girl with her bandaged head. Malay girls went by swinging wide skirts with a rustle of stiff petticoats. Young white women entered the tall office blocks where they worked, fresh and assured as if they had an assignation and were late on purpose.

She walked on, more slowly, and the pain caught up and accompanied her every step. When she halted under the arcade

she had ceased noticing, alone with the many-armed but single agony within herself. People went past her from the upper streets towards the centre of the city. Some glanced at her and hesitated a moment before hurrying on. They saw the hands stiff as wood and the face dead save for the racked glittering eyes in dark rings.

When she wanted to look back along the way she had come the pain gripped at her. They would be after her to take her back to the bed in the hospital and she was terrified, but she could not go on. Not yet, not until she had fought down the dark thing, the evil that was gripping her. She stood there swaying and all things slipped trembling away from her.

They had come to fetch her in the shanty-town and she had lain in hospital in a clean acid-smelling bed. The pain they took away with the prick of a needle and she thought before she faded into sleep that she had been cured, a sense of floating on the clouds, of paradise, her head among the clouds free from pain. But she found she had not been cured. She was taken to a different place and wheeled under an X-ray machine and afterwards an ambulance moved her to the isolation hospital. They told her not to worry, they said reassuring things to her. One among the hospital orderlies was a Mosotho like herself and he translated what the doctor said. He did not look straight at her, repeating the white man's words. She was young but she was ugly and flat-chested and bony and her face was dark with the shadows of suffering. No man would look at her, but when the orderly spoke and his face was averted from her she felt already half dead. She had been brought there to die.

If she died in the hospital they would take away her body and bury it in some nameless place and she did not want that, she could not bear to think of it. She wanted to die in the shanty and be buried curled up like a child with her brow on her knees and all the other children around her in the small patch among the willows, each with a wooden cross and a pot or two of flowers. She wanted someone to look at her, someone to weep.

She felt stronger and started off again trying to walk carefully so each step should not send through her a jarring blade of pain. It was worse where the pavement ran down steep and her feet became unsteady. On the level the going was easier. She was walking in the same direction as everybody else now, office girls and young men and business people and the kind of women who

did not work but were in town for the morning and had parked their cars in the squares. The sun was on their heads as they crossed the wide streets, sun glinting on slowly moving cars and vans and tall green buses. In the lower streets the crowds were quite large and the motor traffic had been diverted. The Mosotho girl plodded on among them all.

They began to delay her, there were so many. But when they turned and saw her they stopped laughing or talking for a moment and allowed her to pass: she was so intent on getting through. They stepped aside to let her go by, but the sense of them on all sides made her afraid. Once she was brought to a halt and she uttered a little desperate cry muffled by the bandages. A white girl swung round and her soft yellow hair flew with her movement. Her brow suddenly contracted and gently she said, "Shame!" A lane was opened by the gay, brightly-dressed people and the Mosotho girl went on, oppressed and dull-skinned and the mindless eyes motionless in their hollows.

At last they stopped her. There was a rope spanning the crossing and beyond it the broad open street full of sunlight, the radiance caught in the funnel of tall buildings. People everywhere, girls in wide-skirted print frocks on the balconies, young men in shirt sleeves leaning from windows, heads against the skyline. The other side of the street was packed with people too. She could not understand it; she did not try to think what was happening. They had stopped her, that was all. Before her was the rope and a few big sunburnt men in the khaki uniform and gold buttons and the white crash-helmets of the traffic control. They were not letting anyone through.

There was a sound of cheering from far down in the valley of the street and drum-beats and a whirl of lilting music. People craned their necks and swayed to see. The girl stared before her; she wanted to go over, to get beyond the crowd and cover some of the long walk home. Nothing else interested her. The pain was rising and sweeping in gradual waves across her senses like dark shadows in the mind's eye, but less intense than before and giving her time to recover.

A line of motor-cycle outriders came up the open street and behind them the cavalcade. It was a cavalcade of flowers, the cars and the picture-floats and old-fashioned landaus all loaded under massed banks of flowers, proteas with their pink and gold and

lavender colours, white arums, poppies, wild aloes and heaths and shining eternelles. The girls were like flowers too, from a distance, white and brown girls laughing and waving back at the crowds.

The cavalcade went on and she waited only for it to end. It stood between her and the continuing of her long flight. It had arrested her when she needed all her strength to keep moving. Everything had gone past her still gaze and now she felt they would let her through. But somewhere at the top of the open street there was a commotion and the outriders and drum-majorettes and pipe-band and the moving flower pictures were rolling down again on the side of the street where the girl stood bewildered and panting like a sheep through her nose.

They came past her quite close but she saw little, the movement and the colour and the feeling of brightness, but not the details. The words people spoke were lost on her too and their laughter was a part of that bright hard feeling that cut into her.

Then she noticed the movement had stopped and she raised her eyes slowly. Only a few feet from her was the queen of the festival, the Flower Queen, a young girl with a fair skin, her white skirt billowing around her and a coronet of glistening pearls against her dark hair. She was waving to somebody and laughing and then she glanced along the ranks of the crowd until she saw the Mosotho girl. Their looks met and the smile faded on her lips. A moment later the procession was moving again and the sick girl's eyes, come to life, followed the other down the street.

Someone was tossing out keepsakes of violets tied in paper ribbons and one fell on her shoulder and slipped to her feet. She did not bend to pick it up, hardly noticing it, and a small coloured boy put it into her stiff fingers. The touch made her start. Her eyes, which had been gazing down the street after the retreating floats, fixed on the blooms and coloured ribbons that she gripped and she thought wildly and bitterly of herself going like this, fleeing across the city, to die. Tears welled suddenly and splashed down the crumpled green blouse front. For a minute she stood with her jaw sagging weakly in the bandage and the tears flooding without a sob, streaming over her cheeks to soak away in the gauze.

The rope was moved and the crowds flowed into the open street. The girl went forward, unconsciously clutching the violets, and soon she had the way of her ahead unimpeded but for the ordinary run of traffic. There were fewer people on the footwalks, but as

she went so slowly she was continually being overtaken. She could think of nothing but the dazzling crown, the dark hair and blue eyes of the Flower Queen, her fair skin and white dress and the laughter welling up in her. The sight of the Mosotho girl with her bandaged head had made the white girl's laughter die in her throat. What had she thought then—had she seen how near death was ? But in a little while she would quite forget, thinking of other things and not the way their looks had met.

"*Ausei* — sister — where are you going ?" The quiet voice was in her language and was like a sound in her own head. "Are you not afraid to walk in the streets ? You are not strong enough."

"I am strong enough," she said in a muffled voice as if answering her own doubts, plodding heavily on and not turning.

The hospital orderly had followed her. He had left the ambulance at the kerb and was walking near her side, but a little behind. He spoke to her softly not to strike fear into her. She was killing herself. Unless he brought her back with her own consent and will, she would die.

"Are you cured yet, *Ausei* ? Have the white people taken away your pain and cured you ?"

"They took away my pain, but they gave it back. I carry it with me. I am not cured."

"Where do you find the strength to rise up from your bed ?"

It was no mere voice in her head. She was being pursued and now her heart was bumping strangely and she could not control it. She stood still again, panting swiftly, and leaned against a shop window, holding her head with one hand.

"I am strong, I am strong enough," she said, and then was silent for a little. "That other one I saw riding there with the crown on her head like the Mother of Jesus in our Church, she could not look at me. She is living and good to look at, and she turned away . . ." She drew her breath, waiting. "The man of my people in the hospital, with a white coat, he spoke to me well. He too could not look at me. Why could they not look in my face ? I am strong, that is why. They are afraid of dying. I am not afraid of death, that makes me strong . . . because I am going . . ."

"*Ausei,* you are not going to die. The man in hospital turned from you to hide his tears. He knew the pain you bear."

"He knew he was looking at one dying."

"No one knows that but God. I knew only how heavy it was

with my sister."

"You . . . are you the man ? No." She gazed but with blank eyes at him. He was not in his overall and was wearing dark things.

"Yes, I am the man."

"The white one with the crown, I saw her, she turned from me too. She knew."

"No, she hid her eyes from pity."

"What is pity ?"

"It is that one knows another's suffering."

"*Ai*!" she moaned quietly, and she looked up at him, her eyes clearing.

"Sister, it is heavy with you, but still you want to live."

She bowed her head again, knowing it was true. For all the pain and the weight on her heart he had given her hope, and with it, fear. She whispered to herself, "I want to live like the others, I want to live, but I am afraid."

"Let me help you, *Ausei.*"

"How can you help me ?" She knew that he could, though it needed every last drop she had left from the great river which gave her life to force herself back. And now she had chosen, she stood a little longer, then turned to go with him.

SPEAKING SHELLEY'S *ODE TO THE WEST WIND*

P. C. BIRKINSHAW

SPEAKING a poem well, that is with ease, freshness and conviction, takes a good deal of preliminary work. This is one of the forgotten exercises of *grammatiké,* which Dionysius Thrax describes as aiming to restore "just the accent, the cadence, the expression with which the sentences were originally spoken, before they were turned from winged words to permanent letters."[1] As the process seeks to transcend writing, there is something paradoxical in writing about it; but it has critical aspects which may interest those to whom it is unfamiliar, at least in its full rigour.

The aim of reading a poem aloud is not merely to vocalize it, but to experience it imaginatively as it is spoken. This assumes a voice fit and flexible enough to rise to any demands made upon it; but it also requires a thorough assimilation of the poem's imagery, syntax and form. A figure scamped, a semanteme skimmed, a sentence perspective bungled, a formal element neglected, will each produce a dead spot in the speaker's experience, and an insensitivity in his communication. The tangle of a first reading must be combed and combed until it becomes as familiar to the speaker's imagination as if its substance were his own.

In reconstituting the poem as speech, attention must be given to each of the five factors of the act.[2] On three of these, the speaker, the situation and the subject-matter, information is often available outside the text, and making oneself aware of this precedes close analysis of the poem itself.

How, first, did Shelley speak? There is no proposal to mimic him, but certain characteristics, especially of range, flexibility and pace, may be helpful in deciding how his verse should flow. What was his voice like? We know very well. "Excruciating," says Hogg. "On first impact . . . it was intolerable, shrill, harsh and discordant; it was perpetual and without any remission; it excoriated the ears." A bad start; but when the first shock is over, Shelley's

[1] T. J. Haarhoff, *Schools of Gaul* (Oxford, 1920), p. 61.
[2] A. H. Gardiner, *The Theory of Speech and Language* (Oxford, 1932), p. 7 ff.

voice becomes "impetuous," "glowing," "vehement." It was of extravagant range. He drives an oniony old woman off a Sussex stage-coach with a recitation of 'For God's sake let us sit upon the ground,' beginning with "wild melancholy" and rising on 'All murdered' to a "fiendish shriek." Again " 'We will have some muffins and crumpets for tea,' the famished Harriet would say. 'They will butter them,' Bysshe exclaimed in a voice thrilling with horror." *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* he read to Hogg "with fervid and exulting energy." Peacock puts the matter in perspective:

> There is a good deal in these volumes [Hogg's] about Shelley's discordant voice. This defect he certainly had; but it was chiefly observable when he spoke under excitement. Then his voice was not only dissonant, like a jarring string, but he spoke in sharp fourths, the most unpleasing sequence of sound that can fall on the human ear: but it was scarcely so when he spoke calmly, and not at all when he read; on the contrary, he seemed then to have his voice under perfect command : it was good both in tune and tone; it was low and soft, but clear, distinct and expressive. I have heard him read almost all Shakespeare's tragedies and some of his more poetical comedies, and it was a pleasure to hear him read them.

The indications of such evidence are that a reading of Shelley will not err if it inclines to speed and accepts without embarrassment tones of emotional fervour and contrast. It is no good playing Chopin like Bach.

Shelley states that the Ode was "conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno near Florence" during October, 1819. Mary and he had just arrived from Leghorn in readiness for the birth of their fourth child. It was the beginning of a stormy winter and the occasion of the poem was undoubtedly the harassed leaves and branches of the Cascine Forest. The full imaginative causation of the poem is described by Neville Rogers.[3] Its components were personal distress, sensory excitement and the poet's current reading and writing. The plan of seeking exile in Italy from the "care and protection" of the State, which had overtaken Shelley's two children by Harriet, had proved a disastrous failure.

[3] *Shelley at Work* (Oxford, 1956), Chap. XII, 'Shelley and the West Wind.'

Mary's second and third children died within a year, and with the bereavements—the first child had died in England—came a sense of estrangement between the parents. Shelley was unwell, nagged by Godwin, disappointed by Covent Garden's rejection of *The Cenci,* hurt by the reviews of *The Revolt of Islam,* and angered by the events of the year in England. The suffering expressed in the Ode is genuine, general and deep : it is unnecessary to read into it, as Leavis does[4], "an element of luxury." Yet under these whips and scorns Shelley was "tameless." His ethico-political idealism was undefeated, and he was on the verge of writing the *Philosophical View of Reform.* Newman Ivey White's discussion of this[5] certainly emboldens the note of passion on which the Ode must conclude:

> Oh, then,
> If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief
> Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me
> And these my exhortations!

As if to the Wordsworthian prescription, Shelley found his consolation in the loveliness of Italy. While the full imaginative situation of the Ode is one of grief transcended, its detail is a series of nature-pictures. The letters from Italy contain the very images of the poem. Thus to Peacock from Naples on 22 December, 1818:

> We have made two excursions, one to Baiæ and one to Vesuvius . . . We set off an hour after sunrise one radiant morning in a little boat; there was not a cloud in the sky nor a wave upon the sea, which was so translucent that you could see the hollow caverns clothed with the glaucous sea-moss and the leaves and branches of those delicate weeds that pave the unequal bottom of the water. As noon approached . . . the light became intense . . .

And from Rome, 23 March, 1819:

> The elms are just budding and the warm Spring winds bring unknown odours, all sweet, from the country.

But the sea-imagery of the poem seems drawn from the "eyrie of glass"[6] at Villa Valsovano where Shelley was working from June

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[4] *Revaluation* (London, 1953), p. 220.
[5] *Shelley* (London, 1947), Vol. II, p. 144—153.
[6] Edmund Blunden, *Shelley, A Life Story* (London, 1946), p. 202.

to September, 1819. Here, in stormy weather, he would have the impression which dominates Section II of the Ode, of being in the centre of a meteorological explosion. "Heaven and Ocean" would form a disc confronting him, and the "steep sky" would rise from the low water-horizon between Corsica and the Ligurian coast. The vertiginous quality of the second section, which has worried recent critics, may express the essence of the view. From this standpoint it is best imagined by a speaker.

Who, in the whole setting of the speech, represents the fourth factor, the listener? The West Wind itself, of course, deified. The Ode is a prayer from the romantic liturgy of Nature. The speaker, therefore, addresses himself to a god in whom his audience will with difficulty believe. Yet such belief must be moved in them. The intense sincerity of the prayer must take its chance of suspending disbelief. This is a poem which cannot be directed to, but must be overheard by, an audience. The prayer, the godling, the Shelleyan heart; these are the factors none of which can be renegued.

The speaker, the listener, the situation and the subject-matter have now been considered. There remains the fifth factor, the medium or linguistic material; and this has four aspects, words, speech-quality, syntax and vocal presentation.

The words and images of the Ode are in the main unequivocal. Certain cruxes which must be resolved, however, include

I. 4. "pale, and hectic red." The comma seems to establish "pale" as a colour, a seeming false division. I think it preferable to take "pale" with "hectic" as qualifying "red." The poet's imagination is at this point passing, through the colour similarity which associates them, from the "leaves . . yellow and black" to the "pestilence-stricken multitudes."

I. 6. "chariotest." How does one confidently imagine the wind *charioting* the winged seeds? Rogers[7] suggests the word may have lingered from Southey's review of *The Revolt of Islam* in which Shelley's beliefs were pictured as confounded in the sea of orthodoxy like the chariots of Pharaoh. If so, Shelley is using it defiantly and with a Blakean inversion of values to suggest truth overwhelmed by the momentary triumph of pseudo-righteousness. I prefer to find the key to the image in the passage from the *Phaedrus* where "Zeus, the mighty lord, holding the reigns of a

[7] *Shelley at Work.*

inged chariot, leads the way in heaven, ordering all and taking are of all." "Winged" thus gains appropriate Platonic overtones n addition to its association with the Greek commonplace, winged words"), and vocally "chariotest" has the thunder of nconquerable certainty about it.

II. 15, 19. The "stream" and the "blue surface" of the wind. The eady stream of air beneath the sky is allowed to develop a "blue urface" on which clouds are shed in the same way as leaves on ie sky-reflecting face of a real stream. The water-image is only inted in "stream" and "blue." Perhaps a faint aural analogy blue/ lew is operative.

II. 17. "the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean." Leavis akes heavy weather of this. D. W. Harding[8] is better, but the nagination's best help comes from Trelawny[9]. He is watching ie 'Don Juan' set off from Leghorn on the 8 July, 1822, with helley and Williams on board:

> Suddenly and reluctantly I reanchored, furled my sails, and with a ship's glass watched the progress of my friend's boat. My Genoese mate observed: "They should have sailed this morning at three or four a.m. instead of three p.m. They are standing too much in shore; the current will set them there."
>
> I said: "They will soon have the land breeze."
>
> "May be," continued the mate, "she will soon have too much breeze; that gaff topsail is foolish in a boat with no deck and no sailor on board." Then pointing to the S.W: "Look at those black lines and dirty rags hanging on them out of the sky — they are a warning; look at the smoke on the water; the devil is brewing mischief."

One feels that if a Genoese mate could see clouds as a line of vashing and as the steam from a malthouse, it was hardly beyond Shelley to see them, on the same horizon and in the same quarter if my earlier suggestion is sound), as "the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean."

II. 18. "Angels of rain and lightning." Rogers is helpful[10]: Symbolical of knowledge and at the same time conveyors

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Pelican Guide to English Literature (London, 1957), Vol. V, p. 212.
[9] Recollections of Shelley and Byron, in *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London, 1935), Vol. II, p. 215.
[10] *Shelley at Work.*

physically of energy: to give the word its Greek sense, 'messengers,' evangelists, almost, of 'Science, Poetry and Thought'.

III. 32. "Baiæ." Daniel Jones and Webster give the classical pronounciation Baii: (Bah-ee). But the line sounds better with the Italian final neutral vowel and rhyming with Maia.

IV. 47. "uncontrollable." A fresh but hardly unexpected aspect of a spirit "wild," "fierce" and "impetuous," which Shelley sees corresponding to his own tamelessness.

V. 63. "dead thoughts." A complex figure. If it were an oxymoron the thoughts would be like dead *seeds*. As "dead leaves" they must be imagined as mulching a "new birth" of action, until the irresistible Hour arrives. I am not sure whether to regard this image as modest or muddled, though the above interpretation is the one I would adopt for reading.

The vocabulary is characteristically emotional. Percepts (ghosts, chasms, clarion, sepulchre) are highly charged, and emotional ideas (wild, sweet, fierce) abound. But there is a sufficiency of dry images, "pumice isles," to keep the imagination from floundering; and the eager pace of the sentences admits warmth, but prevents overheating.

The speech-quality of a poem is natural, if its wording and movement are close to that of present-day speech, artificial if it markedly departs from that norm. Parts of Milton are thus difficult to recover as speech, while Frost or Donne is usually easy. To make this a criterion of serious importance is perhaps a peculiarity of the spoken approach to poetry. The practical reasons are obvious. The aim of a speaker of verse is to establish between himself and his audience, through his script, the full circuit of speech. This is resisted by a work highly artificial in style. The compressed figurative wealth and the predicative accuracy of verse are of its nature, and the art of the speaker does not shirk the task of showing these in their original communicative vivacity. But speech can be denatured and its communicative essence destroyed by excess of artifice. Of this the speaker is the firmest and the best judge. A surfeit of figures, for instance, congeals the flow of the sentence, and a high degree of inversion to meet the demands of rhyme quickly reaches the stage where it embarrasses communication.

The Ode's speech quality is unexpectedly straightforward. There

little inversion and that confined to Section I. Line, metre and yme do not conflict, but rather blend their art with the natural ructure and forward movement of the sentences, and the sultant form has the relaxed brilliance of a corolla. There is tle poeticizing, always a menace in nineteenth-century English erse, where "a wide gap separates the grammar of poetry from at of ordinary life,"[11] "O'er" and " 'midst" are negligible, and the ocative "thou" with its train of unusual accidence ("chariotest," irt," "didst") is not intrusive and, being liturgical, is in any case ontemporary, however much out of fashion.

The syntax of the poem has Shelley's characteristic sophistication. He uses it to create the diptych-pattern of the first three ctions, each with its two-fold invocation of the wind as destroyer" or "preserver." Each "thou" is richly amplified, and oth converge on the single imperative "O, hear!" The second ction disturbs the scheme slightly. Its major antithesis is not ery clear, and the clause from "there are spread" to "The locks f the approaching storm" is a parenthetic statement which breaks ie expected flow of the construction through to "O, hear!" But hat a superb verse period this clause is in itself! In the last two ctions the invocation changes its emphasis from descriptive to ipplicatory. The syntax changes at the same time from intricate o swift and simple. This admirably assists the voice in the athos of Section IV and the power of Section V.

A brief digression on the form of the Ode may be permitted efore passing to the last of its linguistic aspects, vocal presentation. Form is not included by Gardiner as a necessary factor of peech, but it is, of course, a necessary factor of everything. The peaker of the Ode will note the five phases of the argument, the rst three respectively invoking the wind in its action on leaf, loud and wave; the fourth confessional, the fifth precatory. Each ction has (in Rogers's words) "the swift and supple movement iven by *terza rima,* yet each [has] the strength and compactness f a sonnet." This is the geometry of the Ode, but it is typically nd triumphantly Romantic in dissolving the steps of art into ie rhythms of nature. Its artifice seems the unobtrusive condition f its being, rather than an obvious component in its construction r a conscious feature of its message. The speaker will find that

[11] O. Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (Oxford, 1930), p. 213.

the technique of the verse points effortlessly and beautifully the natural modulations of phrase, clause, sentence and paragraph.

Finally to "that delicate movement of living speech," which Yeats calls "the chief garment of life." Notes on vocal presentation have a habit of sounding dogmatic. Speech, as an action, cannot afford indecision. It has its own ways of presenting doubt, irony, ambiguity, reserve; but these, however subtle, are explicit intonations. What is fatal is for the speaker not to know, at any juncture of his speech, what he is going to do. I shall not discuss the possibilities of abandoning the security of prepared positions and allowing deeper levels of decision to operate in the moment of performance. All one's preparatory readings have something of this nature about them. But the pale cast of thought must yield to working decisions on images, emphases and intonations, if a performance is not to be sicklied o'er with muddle, and lose the name of action. Thus the status of "pale" in line 4 is debatable; but the speaker's obligation to commit himself to one choice, and that in his view the best, marks a distinctive and exhilarating feature of the spoken approach to poetry.

Verse 1. Pregnant with the dualism of energy and decay, which the poem is to elaborate, the opening line cannot be rushed. A suppressed exclamatory emphasis on "wild" suggests the very presence of the wind in the imagined situation. The voice expresses the depth and mystery of the thematic paradox by a lingering intensity on "Autumn's being."

2. The broad pattern of Sections I-III is "Thou" (a) and "Thou" (b) "hear, O hear!" The descriptive elaborations (a) and (b) are so massive that the voice must achieve a plangency on each "Thou" to sustain it as the subject of "hear," and to prepare and bring home the essential contrast between the two. The minor perspectives of these complex sentences need careful handling.

2. "Dead" is projected with great force by inversion, line-ending, rhyme and alliteration.

5. The possibility of making "O" the true rhyme, and huddling "thou" into the movement of the succeeding lines, is worth experiment. If the voice moves downward in pitch between "chariotest" and "grave," it echoes the whole visual image, perhaps as Shelley intended.

8-12. A long rhythmic unit which needs a full breath before "until." The music of this passage is obviously part of Shelley's

intention, and forms what Susanne Langer calls a "sensuous transformation."[12] "Blow" and "clarion" are sustained, and "fill" needs a note that will echo in the listener's ear through the parenthesis of line 11 to its conclusion in line 12. Any emotional indulgence to "sweet" will be fatal to the swift touching in of line 11.

13-14. The antithesis at the heart of the poem is here explicit, and these lines must be strongly felt and planted. To avoid hamming "hear O hear," and to preserve its intensity, is a test of any speaker's virtuosity.

15. The vocative note of "Thou" and "Thou dirge" is tinged with awe at the energy and vastness of the storm.

16. The propagation of cloud from leaf imagery occurs in the phrase "Loose clouds, like earth's decaying leaves." The voice has a faint inflexion of surprise for registering such a linkage of ideas, and this assists the freshness good reading aims at.

27, 28. The voice, after echoing in the "vast sepulchre," concentrates its muscular energy on "solid," "black rain" and "burst."

29-33. The axis to establish in the long passage qualifying "Thou" is "who didst waken . . . the blue Mediterranean . . . where he lay . . . and saw in sleep." The visual imagination is called into intense activity in lines 33 to 35, where the sights described are not so much those of a dream as of a sort of veridical vision. By "flowers" the brilliance is so strong that a sense of baffled wonder oppresses the close of the sentence.

37. A breath is needed before "the Atlantic's level powers," or the requisite energy of "cleave" and "chasm" will fail. The voice emerges with such threatening power on "know Thy voice" as to indicate Shelley's identifying the shadowy images of the deep ocean with the colourless stagnation of tyranny. The symbolic overtones of many words in the Ode would make a separate study. For instance "storm" in line 23 almost certainly resounds with the political use of the word in a letter to Peacock of 9 September, 1819.

43. The god, now fully evoked, is addressed in swifter, simpler, more intimate argumentation. The voice speeds through the first nine lines of Section IV, only recalling the power of "cleave" and "chasms" in the linked "pant . . . power . . . impulse," and the note of wonder in "O, uncontrollable."

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[12] *Problems of Art* (New York, 1957), p. 101.

53-56. A moment's reflection on the circumstances of the Ode should defeat any tendency to patronize these lines.

57-64. What Shelley wants is now declared. It is helpful but not necessary in line 57 to recall the views of poetry expressed in the *Defence*. In the parenthetic and subdued lines 58-61 an a-syntactical emphasis falls on the "my" of "my leaves." Although the voice now rings out on "Be thou me," "Drive" and "Scatter," the imperative is still touched by the precatory. In line 64 the imagination flashes for a moment back to line 2. "Birth" has a contained vehemence.

66. Needs practice to combine clarity with speed.

68. Three ardent steps to the climax in line 69.

69 and 70. The famous appeal is difficult. The fervour of the preceding lines passes into "O wind." I prefer a natural reduction of pitch and intensity in the protasis; a slightly prolonged "can," to hint "is it possible that?"; and a rhetorical note that removes all real interrogation from "can Spring be far behind?"

Many hours of thought now pass through rehearsal to a performance lasting five minutes precisely. It is clumsy to explain what one *does* rather than talks about. I will only defend the process by saying that the final performance seems to me exactly what is meant by *on poiein*—'knowing by doing.' Hogg has a picture of Shelley in this very exercise:

> He had a copy of the Grenville Homer, bound in russia, in two volumes, the Iliad in one, the Odyssey in the other; one of these volumes was continually in his hand. It would be a curious problem to calculate how many times he read the whole through. He devoured in silence, with greedy eyes, the goodly and legible characters, often by firelight, seated on the rug, on a cushion, or a footstool, straining his sight, and striking a flame from the coals, with the shovel, or whichsoever of the fireirons he could first seize upon, remaining in front of the fire until the cheek next to it assumed the appearance of a roasted apple. And he would read some sublime passage aloud, if there was anyone at hand to listen, with extreme rapidity, animation and energy, raising his shrill voice until it equalled the crowing of a cock; nor would he cease before he reached the end of the book, and then closing it, he laid it gently upon the ground, and lifting up his eyes to the ceiling, he

exclaimed with heartfelt pleasure, "Hah!", remaining for some minutes in an attitude of veneration, wholly absorbed in pleasure and admiration.[13]

[13] 'The Life of Shelley' in *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London, 1935), Vol. II, p. 60.

WILLIAM FAULKNER: FROM *THE HAMLET* TO *THE TOWN*

ROBERT THONON

SIXTEEN years elapsed between the publication of *The Hamlet* (1940) and *The Town* (1956), i.e. the first and second volumes of what is to become the Snopes trilogy. Both novels are designed to show the progress of Snopesism, the symbol of base money-worship and twentieth-century bourgeois commercialism. The triumph of Flem Snopes in *The Hamlet* undoubtedly left the reader with a feeling of helplessness and wry fatality: within the framework of the novel, nothing could have stopped the rodent-like progress of deceit, greed and mean rapacity. The book seemed to imply that society has to accept Snopesism, compromise with it, give way to it, as did the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend. The impression made by *The Town* is utterly different. Indeed, there is here some glimmer of optimism. Although Flem Snopes cannot honestly be considered as defeated after becoming president of the Sartoris bank, yet on a deeper level of experience and awareness, it is obvious that Faulkner has shifted his position, adopting a more hopeful outlook, on which it may be useful to throw some light.

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The first irruption of the Snopeses in quiet, remote, and forgotten Frenchman's Bend is the sudden arrival of Old Ab Snopes and his family, a family of unknown ancestry, which "appeared suddenly from nowhere."[1] Old Ab is harsh, unsociable, ruthless and irascible, but, as Ratliff, the itinerant sewing-machine dealer and newsmonger, explains, he is not mean at bottom; hard circumstances and human trickery have soured and embittered him. The fact remains that public opinion accuses him of being a barn-burner. His unexpected arrival produces some emotion among the few drummers, horse-dealers and plain working farmers who make up the peaceful population of Frenchman's Bend. Those "Rednecks" originally came from the North-east; they overran the land, which before the Civil War had been owned by proud slave-holders and planters.

[1] William Faulkner, *The Town* (London, 1958), p. 8.

Will Varner, Frenchman's Bend's largest landowner and occasional usurer, is one of those newcomers. He is a man of few moral standards, with "a Rabelaisian turn of mind," a bit lazy, lacking in moral energy and continuously trembling for his money and possessions. To save his barn, his cheap tranquillity of mind and peaceful existence, he is ready to compromise with Old Ab and especially with his son, Flem Snopes. The latter is going to make the most of Will's weakness and pusillanimity. It is significant that, from the very first, Will Varner's devotion to money causes him to become the involuntary accomplice and ally of Snopesism. The materialistic outlook of the "Rednecks" already contains the germ of Snopesism; it is the fertile ground on which and off which Snopesism is going to grow and thrive.

Frenchman's Bend has not always been as it is now. It was previously "the site of a tremendous pre-Civil War plantation,"[2] of which there only remain the ruins of what is called "the Old Frenchman's Place." That old baronial mansion is the symbol of a moral vacuum: the old proud planter aristocracy, dedicated to honour, courage and gallantry, the traditional guardian of the virtues and values Faulkner reveres most, is now tragically absent; its last representative, the Old Frenchman, died many years ago; his name is forgotten and so is his pride, "his pride now dust with the lost dust of his anonymous bones."[3]

All this accounts for the swift and irresistible progress of Snopesism. In Frenchman's Bend there are not any solid moral values capable of stopping it.

Snopesism, rather dimly prefigured in Old Ab, soon finds in Flem Snopes its first powerful embodiment. He wants to make money, for he realizes that

> he himself had nothing and would never have more than nothing unless he wrested it himself from his environment and time, and that the only weapon he would ever have to do it with would be just money. (p. 228.)

He is clear-sighted enough to know how to do it; he will not follow Old Ab's stubborn and hard example: "Ain't no benefit in farming. I figure on getting out of it soon as I can."[4]

From that time his ascent is spectacular. Taking advantage of

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[2] William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (London, 1957), p. 3.
[3] ibid. p. 4.
[4] ibid. p. 22.

Will Varner's fear, he soon obtains a clerk's job in his store and substitutes Jody Varner as supervisor of the cotton gin. The first chapter of *The Town* gives an impressive summary of his achievement: his marriage to Eula Varner, his taking possession of the Old Frenchman's Place, the cunning way he swops it against half of Ratliff's restaurant in Jefferson, which gives him an opportunity to leave the hamlet and move to the town.

Meanwhile Frenchman's Bend is overrun by a swarming invasion of Snopeses: Mink Snopes who takes over Will Varner's rented farm; I. O. Snopes who becomes a smith in W. Varner's blacksmith shop and later school teacher; Lump Snopes who will be the new clerk in W. Varner's store, and finally Eck Snopes, the good-natured blacksmith, and poor Isaac Snopes, the idiot, who falls in love with the cow. The year Flem moves to Jefferson, there are even more Snopeses than Varners in Frenchman's Bend. Except for Eck and Isaac, all Snopeses are characterized by the same ruthless greed and a common irrepressible rapacity:

> They cheat each other, the Varners, the whole community, even the shrewd Ratliff and they do it so impersonally, so imperturbably that their victims are left stupefied or in helpless and abject rage. There seems to be no way of stopping them until, like rodents, they have destroyed or eaten up everything in sight.[5]

In spite or, perhaps, because of the similarity of their aims, little solidarity is to be found among the Snopeses; money and interest set them against one another; speaking of Flem, Mink's wife says: "He'd let you rot and die right here and glad of it, and you know it!"[6] Likewise, Flem refuses to pay the debts of his cousins; he also refuses to help Mink out of the jail where he now sits for having murdered Houston: he even jeers at Mink, who was mean and foolish enough to kill a man, whilst there was no profit in it. The rule of the tribe is the law of the jungle.

Eck Snopes lives apart from Snopesism; his good nature keeps him from associating with his cousins' manoeuvres. As for insane Isaac Snopes, in love with his cow, he lives in a closed world of his own; some critics such as William Van O'Connor view his sodomy as "an affirmation like profound respect and love for the

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[5] William Van O'Connor, *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* (Minneapolis, 1954), p. 118.
[6] *The Hamlet*, p. 69.

fruitful earth herself."[7] In that case, Faulkner's sympathy for Ike would bring into relief the horror he feels for Snopesism, that still greater abnormality. With regard to the progress of Snopesism, however, those two characters are of little significance, and it is obvious, from this short summary of *The Hamlet,* that Snopesism did not find in Frenchman's Bend any worthy and efficient opponent and could use the place as a stronghold from which to proceed towards new successes.

Flem's arrival in Jefferson, which opens *The Town,* is the prelude to a new rise to power; he soon leaves the canvas tent he had set behind his restaurant, eliminates his partner from it, becomes superintendent of the town power-plant, then vice-president of the Sartoris bank at the death of Colonel Sartoris, and finally president of it, after driving Major de Spain out of his position, out of his old mansion, and out of Jefferson altogether.

Just as with Frenchman's Bend previously, Jefferson is now invaded by the numerous tribe of Snopeses

> accreted in from Frenchman's Bend, into the vacuum behind the first one's next advancement, by that same sort of osmosis by which they had covered Frenchman's Bend. (p. 11.)

Flem naturally remains their leading figure, efficient, cold-blooded, laconic, mysterious, a master in the art of double-cross and deceit.

The main reason for his success lies in the moral weakness of Major de Spain. Manfred de Spain is a descendant of the old Southern aristocracy, a former West-Pointer, a lieutenant of the Cuba campaign. From his ancestors he has inherited his dare-devil gallantry, his physical courage. He is also a man of initiative, an enthusiastic admirer of modern ideas; he aims at ridding Jefferson of its ancient and dead patterns; he is the champion of the new order, symbolized here by the introduction of the internal-combustion engine. He is in the eyes of the young generation "the Godfrey de Bouillon, the Tancred, the Jefferson Richard Lion-heart of the twentieth century." (p. 15.) But except for his youthful enthusiasm, he offers nothing solid and valid to balance his rejection of and disdain for the old traditional values. His first betrayal consists in using his father's money to become one of the first stockholders and directors of the Sartoris bank, more

[7] O'Connor, *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner,* p. 121.

evidence that money is definitely the source of all evil in the Snopes trilogy. The total failure of Manfred de Spain is due to his complete lack of moral standards; he is a happy-go-lucky and impulsive gentleman, "incorrigibly and invincibly bachelor." (p. 66.) He does not feel any moral restraint in being Eula Snopes's lover for eighteen years, but becomes very sensitive indeed, once his good name and outward respectability are at stake.

Flem takes advantage of this concern in order to secure the office of power-plant superintendent. He even misappropriates a handful of brass "to see what depth de Spain's base and timorous fear would actually descend to." (p. 236.) Later on, he is elected vice-president of the bank, because of the common support of de Spain and Will Varner, a highly significant association. In order to remove the bank from de Spain's influence, and become president of it, he resorts to a twofold trick. First he withdraws his money from the very bank he is vice-president of, in order to incite other depositors to do the same; then he plays the trump-card which he has been withholding for eighteen years: makes known his intention of revealing publicly the illicit love between his wife and Manfred de Spain. By doing this, he easily persuades Will Varner, the most powerful stockholder in the bank, to deprive de Spain of his presidency. Flem's victory is complete, and de Spain's defeat total. After Eula's suicide, realizing that he has "outraged" the town and its public morality for eighteen years, Flem resigns from the bank and decides to leave Jefferson, offering his old mansion for sale, and moving out West "for business reasons and health." (p. 292.) De Spain's abdication consummates the decay and degeneracy of one of the most famous aristocratic families in Jefferson. De Spain and the corrupted aristocracy are thus the instrument and means by which Snopesism can attain its aims. And so was Will Varner in *The Hamlet.*

But the rise of Flem Snopes to the chairmanship of the Sartoris bank is only part of the story told in *The Town,* and it is now time to discuss the most significant trait of this later novel, which makes it so different from *The Hamlet,* viz., the emergence of a definite and efficient opposition to Snopesism.

The most obvious representatives of this opposition are V. K. Ratliff and, chiefly, Gavin Stevens. In that struggle against such a cunning and unscrupulous enemy as Snopesism, the first indis-

ensable weapon is perspicuity and clear-sightedness. Both, but specially Ratliff, are endowed with it; as quizzical and humorous s ever, terribly shrewd and intelligent, V. K. Ratliff has now ecome, for the necessities of the present crusade, Vladimir Cyrilitch Ratliff, "since everyone who is wise and humane in 'aulkner must have a romantic ancestry to take pride in."[8] Having known Flem for a longer time than Gavin Stevens (he is ne first in *The Hamlet* to reveal Old Ab Snopes's past to the 'renchman's Bend people), he has the advantage of experience; e estimates Snopes better than the lawyer does, and he often affles us by his omniscience. In fact, he acts as Stevens's intelli- ence service.

As to Stevens himself, he is mainly an intellectual, a Harvard nan and a Heidelberg Ph.D.; he is the true representative of the ew aristocracy of the mind, which seems to be intended by 'aulkner to replace the old and now decaying land aristocracy. He s also the faithful guardian and defender of the aristocratic values f the South, its tradition of culture, its deep sense of justice, and s strict code of honour. Not only is he an incorruptible lawyer, ut also a Mississippi gentleman, a descendant of an old planter amily. Unlike de Spain, he has not surrendered to the impera- ve of money, and he is fully conscious of his aristocratic respon- ibilities. In this novel he appears as the modern knight, ready to ct whenever justice and virtue are in danger.

As soon as he sees Eula's chastity threatened, he publicly hallenges de Spain, "defending forever with his blood the rinciple that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not." (p. 69.) His interference is chiefly notivated by de Spain's shocking and unworthy behaviour; what Gavin Stevens is in fact fighting against, is the indignity and legeneracy of the old proud aristocracy.

Likewise, he clearly knows where his duty lies, when he realizes nat Jefferson is in danger because of Snopesism:

> I don't know jest what Jefferson could a committed back there whenever it was, to have won this punishment, gained this right, earned this privilege. But we did. So it's for us to cope, to resist; us to endure, and (if we can) survive. (p. 91.)

These words of Gavin, as reported by Ratliff, show interesting

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A. Mizener in *Kenyon Review*, 19(3) 484, 1957.

affinities with Faulkner's Stockholm Address:

> I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail . . . It is his [the poet's] privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.

Gavin Stevens's crusade against Snopesism, utilitarianism, egoism and sordid materialism is undoubtedly Faulkner's too. In his moralizing statements, Gavin Stevens acts as Faulkner's spokesman.

After his return from Germany after the war, Stevens suddenly feels responsible towards Eula's daughter, Linda; it is as if Eula had bestowed upon him a kind of "fosteruncleship" over her daughter. He is going to take her education in hand: "If to save Jefferson from Snopeses is a crisis, an emergency, a duty, to save a Snopes from Snopeses is a privilege, an honour, a pride." (p. 159.) Having resolved to form her mind, he must detach her from Jefferson, since Jefferson is Snopes, and send her to an Eastern University. He wants to turn Linda into a girl capable of love and sacrifice, "who simply by moving, being, promised and demanded and would have not just passion, not her mother's fierce awkward surrender in a roadside thicket at night." (p. 249.) After Flem has finally given his agreement to let her go, and after Eula's suicide, Gavin thinks the best place to send the girl to will be Greenwich Village in New York: "A place with a few unimportant boundaries but no limitations where young people of any age go to seek dreams." (p. 300.) A puzzling as well as revealing choice, indeed, which proves that for Faulkner Greenwich Village, and with it "a few other places," are the only possible oases in the desert of American materialism, alias Snopesism. If Linda ever finds a worthy husband, "he will have to have courage, because it will be doom, maybe disaster too." (p. 301.) Gavin has now sent into life a soul worthy of the noblest human destiny, "doomed to anguish . . . to one passion and one anguish and all the rest of her life to bear it," (p. 301) a soul which will endure, but also prevail.

Linda has thus vanquished Snopesism; there is a possibility of salvation, a gleam of hope amidst all human despair and mediocrity, as long as souls like hers will keep on struggling, together with men like Ratliff and Gavin Stevens.

This *dénouement* throws some interesting light on the nature of Faulkner's optimism: Linda's fate is not to lead a quiet and peaceful life, but to keep enduring and help others endure. As a matter of fact, all Faulknerian heroes, who are to achieve human perfection and fulfilment, must necessarily recover and realize the tragic sense of life.

Another important source of resistance against Snopesism is to be found, though Faulkner does not declare it explicitly, in woman. Snopesism is essentially a male phenomenon: "All Snopeses are male, as if the simple accident of woman's divinity precluded Snopesishness and made it paradox." (p. 121.) This seems to be the reason why Faulkner has made Flem (as well as Popeye, that other Snopesish character) impotent. It is

> as if *Snopes* were some profound and incontrovertible hermaphroditic principle for the furtherance of a race, a species, the principle vested always physically in the male, an anonymous conceptive or gestative organ drawn into that radius to conceive and spawn, repeating that male principle and then vanishing; the Snopes female incapable of producing a Snopes. (p. 121.)

There are in *The Town* two important female characters, Eula and Linda, and the fact that they constitute for Flem two major and irreducible obstacles is of the highest significance.

Eula, the Helen of Frenchman's Bend, is a beautiful and disturbing embodiment of divine feminity in its most sensual aspects; she is the pagan earth and fertility goddess

> tranquilly abrogating [by her mere presence] the whole long sum of human thinking and suffering which is called knowledge, education, wisdom, at once supremely unchaste and inviolable, the queen, the matrix.[9]

She is pure instinct and incapable of emotional love; her nature is so exuberantly rich and complete that she hardly feels the need for a conventional husband. Eula Varner is "a natural enemy to the masculine race;" she is "Lilith, the one before Eve herself whom earth's Creator had perforce in desperate and amazed alarm in person, to efface, remove, obliterate, that Adam might create a progeny to populate it." (p. 42.) This is why perspicuous teacher Labove foresees that her future husband could not be but "a dwarf, a gnome, without glands or desire, who would be no more

[9] *The Hamlet*, p. 107-108.

a physical factor in her life than the owner's name on the fly-leaf of a book."[10] It is Flem Snopes's destiny to become

> the crippled Vulcan to that Venus, who would not possess her but merely own her by the simple strength which power gave, the dead power of money, wealth, gewgaws, baubles, as he might own, not a picture, statue: a field say.[11]

After a marriage with a man she does not or cannot love (because Flem is impotent), Eula Varner remains infallibly herself, and will never become Eula Snopes either physically or emotionally; she goes irresistibly her way, supremely indifferent to the world's conventions, hardly noticing the presence of Flem at her side, a symbol of supreme and divine assurance.

In spite of his rising to power and his financial successes, Flem, for all his money, will never possess her; other values are here at stake, which money can neither master nor control; doomed as he is by physical impotence, he must give up every attempt to keep Eula all to himself; he is faced with a force superior to himself, which he cannot manoeuvre at will. This must be for him a tragic issue.

There is some parallelism between Flem's irretrievable march towards material success and Eula's invincible progress towards her natural destiny. Since, as we take it, Eula symbolizes nature, fertile, luxuriant, and irresistible, Faulkner's hope and faith in man is shown by the impregnable position she occupies in front of Snopesism and its destructive drives. The fact that Faulkner has made Flem impotent illustrates all the more this powerlessness.

Of course, Eula's attitude towards Snopesism is nothing but inertia. Gavin Stevens falls in love with her, in a somewhat idealistic, highbrow way, aiming at helping her overcome her lust, or sublimate it into love—a programme that will naturally prove rather ambitious and hopeless with such a sensual nature as Eula's, for she will rather follow de Spain's physical appeal. Not being able to rise to Gavin's moral level, she remains passive, rather than dynamic, opposition to Snopesism.

The second female obstacle Flem finds on his way, his daughter Linda, is of a different nature. The bastard child to whom he has given his name, is (unfortunately for him) a girl. She also escapes his fatherly control and grows up outside his money concerns, out

[10] ibid. p. 110.
[11] ibid. p. 111.

of his range into what is least understandable to him, a woman —a woman "who shapes, fits herself to no environment, scorns the fixitude of environment." (p. 245.) Besides, Linda is not to become an 'ordinary' woman, she will upset his future plan, enter an independent life and finally abjure Snopesism, thus becoming a creature of that damnable lawyer Gavin Stevens. Linda cannot conceive of a world without love. This conviction is so imperious in her that she must believe that her mother did really love Flem, was happy with him once, and that she is truly Flem's daughter. Linda has definitely overcome Snopesism with the help of Gavin Stevens; for she is now capable of disinterested love. She too objectifies Faulkner's hope in human nature.

Besides the aristocracy of the mind and the eternal invincibility of womanhood, there is in *The Town* another most important obstacle to the progress of Snopesism: its own self-devouring character.

We have already pointed out the total lack of solidarity between the members of the Snopes tribe in *The Hamlet,* Flem being especially stony-hearted and diabolical. This character is still more obvious in *The Town.* As vice-president of the bank, Flem feels for the first time the need to build for himself, and at least to defend his respectability and good name. Gavin Stevens and Ratliff are aware of it: "A fellow that jest wants money for the sake of money, or even for power, there's a few things right at the last he won't do, will stop at." (p. 224.) But they also know that this new concern will be terribly exacting and drive Flem still farther than just money. When a man

> finds out [respectability] is what he's got to have, and that even after he gets it he can't jest lock it up and sit down on top of it and quit, but instead he has got to keep on working . . . there ain't nothing he will stop at, ain't nobody or nothing within his scope and reach that may not anguish and grieve and suffer. (p. 225.)

Flem's first reaction will be to cleanse Jefferson of two unworthy members of his family: I. O. Snopes, who was mean enough to commit a crime in order to make money, and Montgomery Ward, who dealt in drugs and pornographic view-cards; Byron Snopes having set out for Texas in time, and on his own initiative, with the money he stole from the bank.

Blatant dishonesty and ruthless enterprise become so unbear-

able to him that he must necessarily repress them in others. The primitive greed and rapacity he exhibited in *The Hamlet* now turn to subtler ways. A symbolic illustration of this change of attitude, of his shifting from mere greed to respectability, is given at the end of the novel by the appearance of Byron Snopes's four Indian children; the episode is viewed by Ratliff as "the end of an era" (that of *The Hamlet*), and so "the last and final end of Snopes's out-and-out unvarnished behaviour in Jefferson." (p. 317.) Scorning disdainfully their wild, primitive, unsophisticated avidity, Flem hurriedly sends them back to their father with baggage tags attached to them, meaning by this that he has definitely broken with his previous attitude.

All this shows how precarious the position of Snopesism is at the end of *The Town*. Flem's will to power has acquired such an exclusive and destructive character that it must necessarily destroy the very members of his tribe. Flem Snopes is now left completely alone. How long will he be able to hold on?

Another element that proves the self-destructive character of Snopesism is the realization of Snopeses rejecting Snopesism. This appears for the first time in *The Town*. We notice that Eck's good-naturedness of *The Hamlet* has turned into a more dynamic and efficient quality. The previous massive and irreducible bulk contains thus the germs of its own disintegration. We hear, with relief, that Snopeses do not invariably and infallibly engender other Snopeses. An exceptional mutation produces an honest, courageous and generous Snopes in Eck, who broke his neck while rescuing a Negro from certain death, served only real beef hamburgers in his restaurant, and died "an un-Snopesish" death, when trying to save a little boy from the oil tank, of which he was night watchman. Eck Snopes is "a threat to his family's long tradition of slow and invincible rapacity." (p. 32.) This germ of honesty is even stronger in his son, Wallstreet Panic, called by Gavin Stevens "horse boy, monkey boy, elephant boy," (p. 34.) who adds to his habit of courage and honour the terrible dynamism which is involved in rapacity, and finally becomes "a lion or tiger boy: Gengis Khan or Tamerlane or Attila in the defenceless midst of indefensible Jefferson." (p. 34.) This passage is an eloquent example of Faulknerian baroque. Desiring to make money by simple honesty and industry, and helped by a devoted wife incapable of bearing "them damn Snopes," who has sworn to drag

her husband "by the hair out of Snopes," and to "purify Snopes itself," he resists with the complicity and the money of Ratliff the attempts made by Flem to ruin his business. Faulkner's benevolent attitude towards him is shown by his opening the only wholesale company in Jefferson.

A last weakness of importance in Snopesism is Flem's awareness of a sort of failure in the very midst of his success. Undoubtedly, his weakness and impotence with regard to Eula and Linda, his physical and moral incapacity to fall in love, make him suffer, however dimly. He has the feeling that life and success are incomplete; "he has sacrificed all his life for money, sacrificed all the other rights and passions and hopes which make up the sum of a man and his life." (p. 228.) He is also conscious of his lack of education, and tries to make up for it by the typical reaction of the parvenu, substituting "the advertiser's parasitic culture to the creative culture of Southern tradition,"[12] and refurbishing the newly-acquired de Spain mansion according to Sears and Roebuck standards. There is in this apprehension of all his weakness something pathetic about Flem, so that one must take care, as Eula says, not to feel pity for him. Morally and humanly speaking, Snopesism is, for its most egregious representative and the conscience he has of it, a tragic failure.

The new aristocracy of the mind, eternal womanhood, the self-devouring character of Snopesism, these are the three elements that in Faulkner's present outlook counteract the power and tyranny of money, and its invading materialism. Among them, Flem's awareness of his inner failure, analysed in connection with the self-devouring characters of Snopesism, is the most significant. The disease that in *The Hamlet* threatened to gnaw at society unrelentingly, is now being undermined by its own destructive power. *The Town* brings the internal weakness and deficiencies of Snopesism into relief, and therefore marks an important innovation in Faulkner's treatment of the theme.

Between 1940 and 1956 Faulkner has been progressively changing his outlook on life and human destiny. His critics usually distinguish two great periods in the bulk of his work: the first is mainly concerned with the description of a degenerate world, nightmarish, instinctive, and violent, dominated by fate and pessimism; but the presence of more likable characters, such as

[12] Mizener, p. 485.

Gavin Stevens, of the happy ending and final triumph of love and human dignity, characterizes the second.

In *The Hamlet,* Snopesism bears the mark of the old Faulkner. It receives, in *The Town,* the impact of Faulkner's growing wisdom; for the first time, Snopesism shows signs of weakness, and carries a premonition of its final defeat.

POETS AND HUMANITARIANS IN THE WILDERNESS

The Beginnings of English Literature in South Africa

A. C. PARTRIDGE

AT the time of the British occupation of the Cape, South Africa was still a pioneering land, fitter for rugged activity than sensitive contemplation. Because of its mixed population, there was little social consciousness or settled tradition. Such cultural communities as there were produced fewer novels, plays or poems than influential personalities; and this was only to be expected. It is in the diaries, memoirs and travels of these personalities that we must look for the first evidence of a cultural pattern. A writer like Thomas Pringle, who had an engaging missionary purpose, could exercise considerably more influence on a developing culture than an artist with unmixed aesthetic motives, whose literary style would have fallen upon deaf ears.

The men and women who recorded their impressions were administrators, lawyers, educators, philanthropists or visiting scientists who looked to Southern Africa as a new field of research or endeavour. They were not handicapped by the disability of intellectual isolation that affects the plodding immigrant, who has to wrest his living from the soil. But literature was for them essentially a hobby, rather than a passion; and consequently they tend to be instructive, derivative, or frankly propagandist. There is not much trace in our early literature of spirited reporting of the frontier mind, such as one finds in *Huckleberry Finn;* not, at any rate, in imaginative work, on which literary art depends.

There were, no doubt, poems and novels written in the 19th century. But the verses were either shambling doggerel, the heavy-footed humour of unbriefed barristers in chambers, or effusions of the Signal Hill poetasters, with plentiful attention to landscape and flora, but little feeling and no horizon of experience beyond the vineyards of the Western Province. The fiction was usually prolix narrative, formless in structure and fantastically inaccurate, (like the geographically vague adventures of the midshipmen in the Colony in Captain Marryat's *Midshipman Easy*). Pliny's saying would suffice for all: *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi.*

The intellectual from abroad is even now more impressed with the passivity induced by our climate, than the willingness of English-speaking South Africans to rise and grapple with their future. They see this as a Lotus-land, in which leisure is not something to be prized, but a parasitical growth resulting from a long experience of exploitation. This is the kind of justifiable complaint one hears, in the middle of the 19th Century, from the Rev. T. B. Glanvill of Grahamstown in his essay on 'Reverence':

> In this Colony, slavery has long been abolished, and that source of danger to the dignity of work is removed. But our labouring class is still savage, ignorant, barbarous, and heathen, and as long as this is the case labour will be debased in the eyes of the colonist. This has its remedy in a properly adapted education. There are some who think that education spoils the native for labour. This, in some cases, arises from possibly wrong systems of training in which natives have been taught, or it arises from narrow views . . . Let any work, no matter how difficult and beautiful in itself, be assigned to a despised class, and it becomes despicable. Let any work, no matter how coarse, become the monopoly of a privileged class, as is the case with the farrier's craft amongst some Mussulmans, and it becomes dignified.[1]

Perhaps it was because even the craftsman was a despised labourer that the drama did not appear until 1950. Plays to-day are predominantly social documents of frustration or ironical comment. It is only when people begin to take an *active* interest in their economic, social, and political tensions, that powerful themes for plays present themselves.

Confused as was the picture on the northern and eastern frontiers at the end of the 18th century, there was something epical in its evolution from "misshapen chaos" into the "well-seeming forms" of local administration, constabularies and higher education. The 19th century was the golden age for social historians and historical novelists; in it, all our present conflicts had their roots. A Walt Whitman, a Mark Twain, or even a Hawthorne, would have made much of this birth of a nation, with all its apprehensions and uncertainties. But those who could write, like Lady Anne Barnard and Lady Duff Gordon, were invariably birds of passage. Those

[1] R. Noble, ed., *The Cape and Its People* (Cape Town, 1869), p. 140-41.

/ho stayed, to be stirred to righteous indignation, were not literary raftsmen, moved by the tragedy or pathos of what they saw, but *gents provocateurs* passing judgment upon political morals. Not ll writers could sum up the situation as judicially as Thomas 'ringle when he wrote in his *Narrative of a Residence in South frica* (p. 79):

> Civilization and information must of necessity make but slow and feeble advances among a class of people so situated as the white back-settlers of the wild and thinly-peopled regions on the Bushman frontier. Nor is it the knowledge simply of what is just and right, that will induce men to act justly, or wisely, or humanely . . . Were they the most humane and enlightened people in the world, they could not safely be trusted with such perilous powers . . . Such, alas! is human nature on the large scale, that mere humanity will always be too feeble for passion and selfishness.

Some of the best English writing in the 19th century is to be ound in the mid-century journals, such as the *Cape Monthly Magazine* or the works of women, such as Lady Anne Barnard, ady Duff Gordon and Olive Schreiner. In the two feminine ristocrats, critical observation was deft and charming, not merely ondemnatory. They do not give the impression that they came o write a white paper or report back to a missionary organiza- on. They were steeped in the arts of drawing, music and social ulture, and the tone of their writing, if gossipy, is ideal for the omely journal or letters, by which they are known. Lady Anne arnard came to the Cape in 1795, with her husband Andrew arnard, Secretary to the Governor, Lord Macartney. She was a ifted hostess, and gives us a delightfully tactful account of a racious colonial period. It was she who wrote to her friend Lord undas that the Cape had "great powers in itself to become one f the finest countries in the world."

Lady Anne threw herself wholeheartedly into the life of a people ne was determined to know and to like. She had that warmth of atural sympathy that is so unlike the dour temperament of the uropean who emigrates; for who can write amiably without good nse and good humour? Here are some observations occasioned y a church service she attended at Swellendam on 20 May, 798:

> Some of the young Boers had fine countenances, and two or three of the young women had much Flemish beauty, which one saw would swell within a couple of years into immoderate perfection. We had a good many *kinder* baptized, the boys in their little man's nightcaps: they had three names apiece . . . They rise by candlelight here all the year round, stinting themselves much, as we should imagine, in sleep, did not the two hours' nap they take in bed after dinner make amends for their early rising. They certainly make the most of life by contriving to have two days and nights out of every twenty-four hours, (and) their plurality of meals, two dinners in one day, being equal to their plurality of sleeps—but I do not like their division of time, nor the effects it produces either on the mind or body, sloth and constant eating being certainly the cause of the unwieldy fat, which they have not an idea of preventing or regretting.[2]

A critic of social manners has come unto a land "in which it seemed always afternoon," and is not slow to comment kindly on the over-indulgence in food of its inhabitants.

Now this simplicity of observation and Jane Austenish precision of expression make for writing of an engaging order, and it is a pity that we have not had more of it in our literature. This Scots lady, straight from London high society, on a covered-wagon tour of the hinterland, may be likened to a crinolined cox in the racing boat of Newnham College. She leaves no doubt whatever that she controls the rudder, that her Secretary-husband would have cut a sorry official figure without her. She was an indefatigable organizer and collector, though not like Martha encumbered with wordly things. Her philosophy and humour are as charming as her gossip. For instance, on return from her tour to the cottage at Newlands after which Paradise Estate is named, she found that "the cow, hitherto mild, had become insolent, and had offended the laws by walking on the parade, the consequence of which was that, like other caitiffs, she was put in the *Tronk,* where she then was. If anything could have made me laugh, it was this last misfortune."[3]

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[2] H. J. Anderson and A. C. G. Lloyd, eds., *South Africa a Century Ago* (Cape Town, 1926), p. 212-17.
[3] ibid. p. 234.

Some early annalists are, however, in apparent confusion about the native types they describe, especially the races of Hottentot and Bushman. I have no doubt that racial admixture was already far gone in the Cape by the year 1800; but the following passage is typical of others to be found in Lady Anne Barnard:

> Every Hottentot child born in the family when the mother is receiving wages is the property of the master of it for twenty-five years, which is supposed a proper length of time to compensate for the charge of maintaining the child in infancy. It is in reality about twelve years too much. A Hottentot child is at seven years of age employed to tend fowls, sheep, cows; and its work fully repays the expense of its miserable board. The six following years are certainly sufficient to liquidate the past and pay the present; at thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen at most, I should think the child ought to be free; and I have some reason to hope the Governor will shorten the term of slavery to those poor oppressed creatures. I am sure he will, if he thinks it just.
>
> While taking the picture of the Hottentot girl in her own attitude, I spied a poor *clyne* Hottentot in a chair which had lost the matting, by way of a go-cart, to keep it from harm. Its mother, they told me, was a Boschewoman and in the fields with the goats. I had never seen a right Boschewoman, and begged them to send for her, which they did. Meantime I took the child out of its chair, set it on the floor, gave it an apple, and bid it sit still . . . In this situation it remained till the Boschewoman arrived from the goats and entered the room. There was something beautiful in seeing the little god wakened from his sleep (probably by her smell), and crawling on all fours directly to the place where stood its miserable parent, who, pleased and proud, gave it something for its reward that no one would have robbed it of.
>
> Her countenance was sweet to a degree—extremely like Lady ———'s; her size about four feet, and her shape singular enough behind, as far as one could judge by the rotundity which her sheepskin seemed to conceal, though a slender woman. I cannot think this was a real Bosche-

woman, her countenance had so much of the Hottentot mildness in it.[4]

In connection with the diarist's remarks about the condition of the Hottentots, it should perhaps be pointed out that it was not until 1828 that the latter became free subjecs; but because they were not saleable, they were, and had always been, in a more degrading situation than the slaves themselves. They did the same menial tasks, and were as harshly punished, but were not as well fed and clothed as the slaves who had market value. They were indeed, expendable and were often sent to herd cattle in the most dangerous places, where slaves would not be risked.

Thomas Pringle, the Scots poet and 1820 Settler, was a much heavier-footed diarist than Lady Anne—he had less of her grace of humour, or submerged it with a cumbrous burden of philanthropy. Pringle came to the Cape at a critical time in our history, in what might be called our forty years in the wilderness 1810-1850, during which a European population of about 25,000 nearly trebled itself, despite the exodus of the Great Trek. The humanitarians in England were as active as they are now, and their object was the total abolition of slavery, which they finally achieved in 1834. Pringle seems, in fact, to have emigrated less as a settler than as a scout for Wilberforce and his committee. Huddleston-fashion, he reported to London on the present state of the aborigines and their less fortunate brethren in the service of the white settlers. Pringle was much more careful than Lady Anne Barnard to spice his *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* with scientific or pseudo-scientific data (e.g. the use of live fowls for relieving snake-bite), as well as with sociological matter. His poems, too, were social documents, or Thomas Bowler landscapes in verse, with a water-colourish fluidity of diction. Pringle's biographer, L. Ritchie, in the *Poetical Works* of 1838, says that "Literature, with him, was inseparably connected with the practical amelioration of the human race." In *The Bechuana Boy,* from which I quote, we have a typical speciment of the poetry he wrote:

Away—away on prancing steeds
The stout man-stealers blithely go,
Through long low valleys fringed with reeds,
O'er mountains capped with snow,

[4] ibid. p. 214-215.

Each with his captive, far and fast;
Until yon rock-bound ridge we passed,
And distant stripes of cultured soil
Bespoke the land of tears and toil.

And tears and toil have been my lot
Since I the White Man's thrall became,
And sorer griefs I wish forgot—
Harsh blows, and scorn, and shame!
Oh, Englishman! thou ne'er canst know
The injured bondman's bitter woe,
When round his breast, like scorpions, cling
Black thoughts that madden while they sting!

Yet this hard fate I might have borne,
And taught in time my soul to bend,
Had my sad yearning heart forlorn
But found a single friend:
My race extinct or far removed,
The Boor's rough brood I could have loved;
But each to whom my bosom turned
Even like a hound the black boy spurned.[5]

The aim of this poem he described as "condensation"—an attempt at "the simple language of truth and nature." But the circumstantial and sentimental detail makes it diffuse and unreal —it resembles the idealized engraving of the 'Boy' by Landseer and Stewart, with its formal foreground of mimosa and springbok, and its background of aloes, ostriches and flattened koppies. In fact, the most pathetic aspect of the Bechuana boy's story is its sequel, which Pringle recounts in a letter, as follows:

> The poor dear boy, whose history suggested those verses, was received by me as a little servant for Mrs P, to whom he speedily became most affectionately attached; but as his intellect and disposition unfolded themselves, he exhibited so much amiable and excellent feeling, and good sense and delicacy, that he became to us rather a child than a menial attendant. He accompanied us to England,

[5] Leitch Ritchie, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Pringle, with a Sketch of His Life* (London, 1839), p. 6.

> and we began to think of giving him such education as might eventually enable him perhaps to return to his native land in the capacity of a missionary or teacher—for which he manifested both the wish and the capacity; but, poor fellow! after he had been about eighteen months in England he was seized with a pulmonary complaint, which carried him (I feel assured) to a *better world,* for he became, to the extent of his knowledge, a most exemplary Christian; and his death-bed was a scene such as is seldom witnessed for child-like and heavenly innocence.[6]

Pringle goes on to admit that "the springbok, and his [the boy's] mode of joining us, are poetical licences." But as these are the two pathetic elements in a moral tale, Pringle's missionary zeal seems, in this instance, to have exceeded his love of truth.

Coleridge, who was not only a pious man but a good judge of poetry, regarded Pringle's *Afar in the Desert* as "among the two or three most perfect lyric poems in our language," and had copies distributed among his friends. But when Samuel Rogers writes of Pringle's poetry that: "Much of the imagery is as new as it is beautiful," and values it as a cultural "importation," we realize that criticism here is epistolary compliment, unsupported by genuine analysis. Except in the line

> Thrills to the heart like *electric* flame

which must have been novel in 1828, the images, when present at all, are of the most conventional kind, such as the *"death-fraught* firelock in his hand/The only law of the Desert Land." Pringle mentions no less than sixteen wild animals in as many lines, and his attempts at local colour give the appearance of novelty, where none really exists. But lest I should appear to be prejudiced, let me cite this as a picture of the Karroo:

> Away—away—in the Wilderness vast,
> Where the White Man's foot hath never passed,
> And the quivered Coranna or Bechuan
> Hath rarely crossed with his roving clan:
> A region of emptiness, howling and drear,
> Which Man hath abandoned from famine and fear;
> Which the snake and the lizard inhabit alone,
> With the twilight bat from the yawning stone;

[6] ibid. p. cxliii.

Where grass, nor herb, nor shrub takes root,
Save poisononus thorns that pierce the foot;
And the bitter-melon, for food and drink,
Is the pilgrim's fare by the salt lake's brink:
A region of drought, where no river glides,
Nor rippling brook with osiered sides;
Where sedgy pool, nor bubbling fount,
Nor tree, nor cloud, nor misty mount,
Appears, to refresh the aching eye:
But the barren earth and the burning sky,
And the blank horizon, round and round,
Spread—void of living sight or sound.[7]

This is the nostalgia of the exile for Scottish lochs, as well as the revulsion of a man who is never likely to take root. Pringle passed through the Karroo like "a foiled, circuitous wanderer," who nevertheless wrote poetry about it as a kind of "emotion recollected in tranquillity," a rather distasteful emotion. The consolation for this kind of displaced person is of the religious and humanitarian order, and so he concludes the poem as follows:

And here, while the night-winds round me sigh,
And the stars burn bright in the midnight sky,
As I sit apart by the desert stone,
Like Elijah at Horeb's cave alone,
'A still small voice,' comes through the wild
(Like a Father consoling his fretful Child),
Which banishes bitterness, wrath, and fear, —
Saying— MAN IS DISTANT, BUT GOD IS NEAR !

Pringle seems to me the kind of minor poet who sees *with* the eye, and not *through* the eye. There are, nevertheless, merits in *Afar in the Desert;* the anguish, even depression, which is caused by beauty in desolation is very real, and the depth of feeling is not spoilt by the animated rhythm in which the poem is written. But there is more conviction in his sentiments when he writes in the astringent strain of this jibe at Colonial hypocrisy:

While around the cattle pen
Loudly laught the 'Christian men!'

[7] ibid. p. 10 and 11.

How can Dutch or English care
For Africans with woolly hair?
What care they who dies or lives?
They have got the bonny beeves.
And, to hallow this day's work,
They'll tithe the spoil to build a kirk![8]

Pringle's primary object in persuading his father and brothers to settle in South Africa was to unite his scattered family in what he called "rural independence," they being then tenant farmers in the Roxburghshire district of Scotland. £50,000 had been voted by the Imperial Government for a scheme to settle emigrants in the newly formed Eastern Province of the Colony, and such was the economic distress in England at the time that some 80,000 people applied for the privilege. Only 5,000 persons were eventually selected to make up the band of pioneers known as the 1820 Settlers, and among them were Pringle and his Scottish party. His *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa,* covering the six years 1820-1826, describes his arrival and subsequent experiences at the Cape.

This document, it must be remembered, was written before the Great Trek began, and as one pages this Jeremiad, interspersed with travelogues in a prosy Victorian style, one sees clearly the background of that great adventure. Pringle was determined to regard himself as "the advocate and protector of the oppressed children of the African desert" (I quote from the inscription on his tombstone). He returned to Cape Town from the Eastern Province via Graaff Reinet and Beaufort West, reported some genuine instances of hospitality, and corrected his first impressions of the Karroo by describing its beautiful transformation after a few inches of rain. He also commented on the wretched state of the country prisons and the unfortunate non-Europeans who filled them. Here is his description of the *tronk* at Beaufort West:

> This tronk consisted of a single apartment, of about twenty feet long by twelve or fourteen broad; and for the purposes of light and ventilation, had only one small grated opening, in the shape of a loop-hole, at a considerable height in the wall. Into this apartment were crowded about thirty human beings, of both sexes, of all ages, and

[8] *Afar in the Desert* (London, 1881), p. 232.

> of almost every hue—except white. The whites, or *Christen menschen,* as they call themselves, are seldom imprisoned, except for some very flagrant outrage.[9]

He goes on to describe, in detail, some of the "guiltless" prisoners; one was a man of "herculean size and strength," whose face, "though free from ferocity, was animated by intelligence." Another had "a certain air of mental dignity and reflection." A woman had a "kerchief of fine leather . . . drawn, like a veil, over her bosom . . . [from] . . . feelings of womanly modesty and decorum . . . Her deportment was quiet and subdued . . . her features . . . expressive of gentleness and simplicity of character." Once again we are presented with the picture of the idealized "noble savage."

On the subject of Slavery, Pringle had no illusions of lenity. In Ch. XII he said:

> I had long been convinced, from sad observation, of the utter fallacy of the allegation, then so constantly heard both in the Colony and in England, that slavery at the Cape was "so mild as to be almost nominal." I had seen it, on the contrary, continually overflowing with misery, cruelty and debasement.

Although practically always without means, he personally liberated a number of enslaved persons. One called himself Springle, another died in his arms in a London hospital, also a victim to the rigours of the English climate. After a clash with the Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, over the establishment of an independent press at the Cape, Pringle returned to England in 1826, and was fortunate in securing the appointment of Secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society. He was admirably suited to undertake this work by reason of his experience of the natives in South Africa, and the next eight years of unselfish devotion to the cause of humanity were the crowning achievement of his life. The Act of Abolition, at a cost to the Imperial Government of 20 million pounds, was brought into operation on the 1 August, 1834, and Pringle died in December of the same year.

Undoubtedly he was a very great man, as humanitarian, if not as man of letters. Like many idealists who held ultra-liberal views, his zeal was not always tempered by political prudence, but he shared the impeccable moral character of many great men of this

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[9] *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (London, 1840), p. 59.

age, among whom we must number Dr Philip and Bishop Colenso. But he had also certain naïve, if patriotic, beliefs in the justice and integrity of the Colonial Government in England, as appears in the following extract from one of his Cape press articles:

> To the Dutch Colonists, now our countrymen and fellow-subjects, we particularly address the following remarks. However much they may occasionally have been galled by the unfair or unfeeling sarcasms of English travellers and journalists, they may rest assured that the regards of the government and people of England are directed towards them with indulgent liberality and affection. Let authors be judged of by their words, but nations and governments only by their actions. England, of all nations that ever existed, pursues the most liberal system of policy towards the colonies she has won or nurtured . . . This colony, if abandoned by England, would fall an easy prey to the first rapacious tyrant that chose to seize upon it. Under her free and fostering guardianship alone may we rationally hope to attain permanent prosperity, liberty, and happiness.[10]

The development of a distinctive South African self-consciousness makes its appearance in the latter half of the 19th century, and in no writer more unequivocally than in William Rodger Thomson, who was born at Balfour, district Stockenstroom, in 1832. His father, of Scots ancestry, was Dutch Reformed minister of the Kat River Settlement, a community designed to afford the remnants of the Hottentot people a respectable re-birth under missionary guidance. Young Thomson studied at the Lovedale Seminary, and at Glasgow, Edinburgh and Utrecht Universities. At the last of these he joined a number of Cape students, including the Rev. Jan Hofmeyr, in forming the "Pro Patria" society, He returned to South Africa in 1861, became a professional journalist in Cape Town and editor of the *Volksvriend,* official organ of the Evangelical party in the Dutch Reformed Church. He also did some editorial work for J. C. Juta, then the leading publishing house at the Cape. Thomson planned an impartial and well-documented history of South Africa, which he never completed; but he made a delightful translation from the German of Mentzel's

[10] ibid. p. 65.

ography of Siegfried Allemann, who was the notorious Governor n Noot's chief lieutenant. In 1864 he entered the Legislative ssembly as member for Fort Beaufort, but died in January 1867. Thomson was a most outspoken advocate of racial harmony tween the English- and Afrikaans-speaking sections in the olony. He wrote:

> There are Anglicised Africanders in abundance, but thorough-going, good representative English-Africanders, I fear very few. There are those Englishmen who deign to do us the favour to come and live amongst us, who affect a supercilious contempt for everything colonial, who assume a haughty air and insolent bearing, who are always talking of home, and their great friends there who, when they have sucked what they can out of the colonial orange, throw the peel and pulp away, go home, and speak or write libellous things about the colony and the colonists. They are a contemptible set, not deserving of further notice as types of colonial life. But there are born colonists, who, forsooth, choose to imitate these wretched models. Though born and bred in this land, you hear them talking loudly, and not very learnedly about home—how sick they are of the colony, how they wish they could only get into a more congenial sphere. Let them go and find it if they can . . . It strikes me that about the very best type of colonial life which we can find is the Anglo-Dutch Africander, the descendant of a Dutch father or mother, and an English mother or father. Dutch conservatism, and English colonial enterprise and progressiveness, unite in him in the formation of a type of character which, purged of a few defects, will be, or ought to be, the standard of colonial life.[11]

Some of this sounds very like the letters we read in contemrary newspapers.

Thomson, like Olive Schreiner, who also spent part of her youth the Balfour district, learnt to respect the naïve simplicity and iginal integrity of the Boer mind. He tells this story against mself:

> One evening I tried to explain to them, in the simplest way I could, some of the grand fundamental truths of

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[11] *Poems, Essays and Sketches* (Cape Town, 1868), p. 173 and 174.

> astronomy. I was of course heretical enough to try and upset their favourite whim and belief that the earth and sea are as flat as Table Mountain, and that if you only travelled far enough, you would tumble over the edge. The next morning, while riding in the country, an old farmer who had been present the previous evening, met me, and after the usual salutations and inquiries about "allemaal T'huis," he said, "Well, Sir, now I believe, after what you said last night, that the earth is round. But you told us, besides, that it turns upon its own axis" (axis and axle in Dutch are expressed by the same word); "that I can't and won't believe." "Why?" I ventured to ask. "Because," said he—referring me to the axles of his wagon, and the tar-pot hanging between the wheels—"Because I should first like to see the tar-brush with which they grease that axle!"[12]

In Thomson and Olive Schreiner, who is far better known to the modern South African, we have two intellectual pioneers of racial integration. Challenging as is our greatest 19th century novel *The Story of an African Farm,* Olive Schreiner's real claim to distinction as a social observer is her *Thoughts on South Africa;* yet it has been surprisingly neglected both by statesmen and public. The essays were collected in 1923, three years after her death, by her husband, but were actually written before the Anglo-Boer War. Olive Schreiner put the future of South Africa before all the canons of her art, which were largely intuitive. She saw beyond the distinctions of race and colour, was a ready champion of the under-dog and an active opponent of every kind of injustice; so that it is a great pity she is sometimes pictured in her private relations as anti-social and neurotic. The fervour of her patriotism and the truth of her prophetic insight are well illustrated in the following passage:

> . . . there is a subtle but a very real bond, which unites all South Africans, and differentiates us from all other people in the world. *This bond is our mixture of races itself.* It is this which divides South Africans from all other peoples in the world, and makes us one . . . Wherever a Dutchman, an Englishman, a Jew, and a native are superimposed, there is that common South

[12] ibid. p. 171-72.

African condition through which no dividing line can be drawn. The only form of organization which can be healthily or naturally assumed by us is one which takes cognizance of this universal condition . . . Difficult as it may be, it is at once simpler and easier than the consolidation of any separate part. It is the one form of crystallization open to us, the one shape we shall assume . . . if the South Africa of the future is to remain eaten internally by race hatreds, a film of culture and intelligence spread over seething masses of ignorance and brutality, inter-support and union being wholly lacking; then, though it may be our misfortune rather than our fault, our doom is sealed; our place will be wanting among the great, free nations of earth.[18]

[18] *Thoughts on South Africa* (London, 1923), p. 61-63.

OSCAR WILDE

(A paper given to the English Association, Cape Town, on 14 April, 1959.)

A. G. WOODWARD

IN spite of the panache which still attaches to Wilde's name in literary history, he is not, by any means, a writer of the first rank. All his works, with the exception of *The Importance of Being Earnest,* reveal a disconcertingly shoddy imaginative quality when they attempt to deal with serious issues, as they often do. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is spoilt by a posturing melodrama which is worthy of Ouida; the plays like *Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance,* and *An Ideal Husband* are riddled with absurd and sentimental histrionics. We can see, at a distance of sixty years, and in the light of a more elastic social code, that the fault of his work was not its immoral tendency—the press and public of the time merely played into Wilde's hands by accusing him of that—but the fact that so much of it was badly written. If they had judged him on his own chosen ground of aesthetic value, they would have had a fairly cast-iron case. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that we now see him in history and not in the daily newspapers, he still imposes himself on the imagination; and not just on account of a sensational trial, important though that was.

There are two reasons for this: he was a vital representative figure in the later development of the Romantic Movement in its social, psychological as well as literary ramifications, and he was also a fascinating personality in his own right; doubly so by reason of his symbolic relationship to the social and literary tendencies of his time, a symbolic status which he quite consciously cultivated. One remembers that extraordinary and much-quoted remark to André Gide: "I have put all my genius into my life; I have only put my talent into my work." Allowing for Wilde's chronic self-dramatization, this remark can, I think, be taken as almost literally true, and I shall come back to it later; but what has all this to do with literature?—a second-rate writer who is a "representative figure," and a charming talker and wit. One often

/onders, when reading criticism which deals exclusively with an uthor's life, psychology, social and historical background etc., /hat it all has to do with literature. And the fact that one does so /onder suggests an important distinction in critical method which eems to be in our minds when we speak of literature.

There are works of art which are so self-sufficient in the quality f their imaginative life that they can, and should, be criticized /ithout extraneous considerations of the author's life, or sychology, or social background. They can be judged in purely esthetic terms; and it is perhaps worth noting that a very im-ortant body of modern criticism has precisely this emphasis. Far emoved in tone, seriousness, and rigour of discipline as these nodern critics are from the imprecisions of the Aesthetic Move-nent, they are still asserting what Wilde himself asserted in a entence of *Dorian Gray:*

> An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of auto-biography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty.

Now I doubt whether any modern critic would put the matter n quite such an extraverted way; but the essential similarity is here: the autonomous reality of the completely achieved work of rt, which can be adequately criticized in purely aesthetic terms. Hence the whole Aesthetic Movement can best be seen as a ather exaggerated curve on the path that seeks a definition of iterature which will not just equate it with morality, psychology or sociology. The 'formalism' of a Clive Bell, for instance, and he criticism of W. K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, and René Wellek, re simply more recent and sophisticated versions of this search.[1] Even Pound's theory of the image, and Eliot's emphasis on im-ersonality can be seen as fellow-travellers.)

Wilde's sentence implies the other half of the distinction I wanted to draw. ("We live in an age when men treat art as if t were meant to be a form of autobiography;" he might just as vell have said "psychology," "morality"). Opposed to the auto-nomous works of art are those whose interest lies mainly in what one might call extra-aesthetic considerations. Imperfect creations, hey nevertheless reflect, or sum up, a period or a phase of culture

[1] These affinities are traced most convincingly in Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image,* especially in the last three chapters.

with peculiar vividness — this is true of much of Byron and Musset, for instance; they may provide a necessary background to our understanding of the great works of a period, give us the feel of the time. I am thinking of minor Elizabethan drama, minor Victorian novels, or minor eighteenth-century verse, all of which make us realize more fully the aesthetic self-sufficiency of a Shakespeare, a Dickens, a Pope. Finally, these kinds of work may reflect the development, and the dilemmas, of a specially vivid and fascinating personality, but a personality who has not successfully objectivized his feelings in a work of art. All of these three categories can be made to apply to Wilde. So if I appear to be merely using *Dorian Gray* and the plays as symptoms of Wilde's psychology, I do so intentionally, but with a vivid awareness of how unprofitable this kind of criticism can be when a work is successful in its own right. But Wilde's works *are* unsuccessful, I think everyone would agree. He only once succeeded in harmonizing the elements of his own personality into a completely successful work, in *The Importance of Being Earnest,* and the fact that he managed it with that play and no other has an interesting explanation, as I hope will emerge later. *Dorian Gray* and the other important plays are marred by emotional crudities, jarring tones; but these discords do reflect the discords of Wilde's own personality.

So if I speak about Wilde's admittedly unsuccessful works, it implies that I think him significant enough, as a portent and a personality, to have even his failures analysed. By circumstances, and by his own personal temperament, he was put into what he called "a symbolic relationship" with his age. He was the spokesman of an aesthetic theory, the rebel against a social order; but before looking at Wilde's own work, I want to mention as briefly as possible some of those tendencies with which he felt himself to be in a symbolic relationship—symbolic to the point of overemphasis and melodrama.

Wilde was one of the culminations of the Romantic Movement, and it is, of course, a *cliché* of literary criticism that one of the main features of Romanticism was the rebellion of the individual —usually the individual artist or intellectual—against the society in which he lived; because that society seemed so ugly, so materialistic, and so imbued with the rational scientific spirit, that it destroyed all the finer intuitive responses of the individual.

Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne and Walter Pater each sang, with variations of pitch and key, a mounting hymn of hate against the emotional and spiritual inadequacies of English bourgeois values, against Arnold's Philistines, in fact; and Wilde, as the spokesman of the Aesthetes in the 1880's simply carried that attitude to its most paradoxical extremes.

The Aesthetes in England were given an encouraging fillip by similar doctrines emanating from France. There Gautier, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and finally the Decadents and Symbolists, had evolved a theory of art and an attitude for the artist, which carefully flouted all the traditional expectations that art should have some purpose that would bring it into significant relationship with society as a whole; art, according to them, was for art's sake. So it was from France that Swinburne and Rossetti, with some reservations,[2] and Wilde, with no reservations, obtained this helpful doctrine, which could be flaunted along with lilies and blue porcelain china in the face of the obtuse Philistine public. In practice "art for art's sake" meant, at the hands of Wilde and the English Aesthetes, an excessive concern with 'exquisite,' colourful *surface*-effects, in poetry and prose. They emphasized, as one might expect, form at the expense of content; but reduced to a very trivial, superficial level the careful statements made about the problem of form by Flaubert or Walter Pater.

Walter Pater was, in a sense, the theoretical founder of English Aestheticism, and he carried to several further extremes that trend of spiritual rebellion discernible in English nineteenth-century culture. Pater not only suggested that the values of that culture were ugly and wrong, but that 'values' in the accepted sense—in life and in art—were quite pointless.[3] Life should be lived for the exquisite moments that it provided; the senses were to be gratified to the full—tastefully, of course—in order that we might gain a fuller expansion of our emotional nature. Art provided that expansion, hence the pursuit of the beautiful, not the search

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Rossetti, for example, always resented being lumped together with the Aesthetes of the 1880's; this emerges clearly in O. Doughty's book *A Victorian Romantic, Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1949).

I am, of course, oversimplifying Pater's position, intentionally, and presenting it in the rather crude form in which Wilde, for one, gave it popular currency. Graham Hough in *The Last Romantics* makes very clear the complexities of Pater's doctrine.

for the good, was the aim of life; and, in any case, the beautiful was the good, and the true.[4]

This strain of Hedonism, of avowed Immoralism, for the sake of some higher individual ethic of self-realization, is perhaps the most interesting background against which to see Wilde. It was a European-wide movement, a "crisis of morals" due to the gradual dissolution throughout the nineteenth century of the traditionally binding Christian moral framework; a movement which had its most profound statement in the writings of Nietzsche and in the novels of Dostoevsky. Both these writers, interestingly, had a great influence upon André Gide; and Gide carries over the strain of Immoralism, with great refinements, into the twentieth century. Gide, of course, knew Wilde, and had the most intimate sympathy with him, both as man and writer. Hence Pater, Wilde and Gide form an interesting cluster, for many reasons.[5]

The important point is, however, that Pater and Gide, as well as Nietzsche, all gave a more subtle and mature account of their "transvaluation of values" than Wilde was capable of giving. Wilde responded, with violent sympathy, to this moral and literary atmosphere, but was incapable of giving his response any essential seriousness. He used it to cut a dash. This made him, naturally, an excellent publicist for the moment. One remembers Max Beerbohm's catty remark: "Beauty had existed before 1880, but it was Mr. Oscar Wilde who managed her *début*"—and that exactly catches the strain of chic exhibitionism which mars Wilde's critical writings. *The Decay of Lying* and *The Critic as Artist,* for instance, teem with paradoxical insights of great penetration about the relationship of art to life and about the "mode of existence" of a literary work of art; but it is all done so remorselessly, as a form of brilliant acrobatics, that we lose patience after a while, with the result that the criticism, like the novel and the plays, ends by interesting us mainly as a symptom of Wilde's personality

[4] Keats was, of the early Romantics, singled out for special admiration by the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetes; not only for such sympathetic doctrines as could be annexed from the *Ode on a Grecian Urn,* but also for the richly decorative surface effects of which his poetry is so full.

[5] There is the direct personal link between Pater and Wilde, and Wilde and Gide; there is in the writing of each, in various forms, the theme of a "Transvaluation of Values"; each had a Theory of Art that was at any rate not didactic or sociological; and each carried on an intermittent flirtation with Christianity.

ather than for its own coherent validity.[6] So, too, with *The Soul of Man Under Socialism;* it is interesting in that it shows Wilde making elegant gestures in the direction of overt social anarchy, as a pendant to his moral and aesthetic anarchy, but it is no more.[7] Nor could it be any more, because the point is that Wilde was never a serious anarchist of any kind. He is essentially the naughty adolescent getting a kick out of shocking the grown-ups; and his whole *raison d'être* depends on an unacknowledged acceptance of the values of that moral and social order he so delights in shocking.

Wilde certainly had the best of causes for feeling himself at variance with the moral values of his society. His unavowable homosexuality would have made him an outcast, and eventually did so. But his particular temperament, acting on his particular situation, caused two conflicting strains to emerge in his nature and in his art. On the one hand he delights in flaunting his difference' at society, carefully disguised as Hedonism, Immoralism, Aestheticism etc. He flouts it in the form of impudent paradox, flippant dismissal of all the most cherished values; this is the Oscar whom delighted dinner-parties were prepared to accept, with whom even the daily press carried on a curious love-hate relationship, and who appears in his work in characters like Lord Henry Wotton, Lord Darlington, Lord Illingworth, Lord Goring—the socially acceptable shocker. But this side of Wilde is essentially contradicted by an intensely strong feeling of guilt and sin, springing from his real need to be accepted by the others,' in spite of his paradoxical rejection of them.

From this arose the extraordinarily dramatic quality of his own life, where it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that he actively sought the disaster which overtook him, from a hidden masochistic urge for punishment and atonement, abetted by his chronic love of self-dramatization.[8] It is surely significant to what an extent Wilde, even before his actual downfall, was attracted to the Christianity of the New Testament, to the point of expressing himself among his friends in "parables;" the attraction, for him,

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Wilde's criticism has been examined, from this point of view, in fascinting detail by Robert Merle, whose *Oscar Wilde ou La Destinée de l'Homosexuel* (Paris, 1948), is one of the best modern books on Wilde.

It is worth noting to what extent the French Symbolists and Decadents were associated with 'anarchist' movements.

Merle, *Oscar Wilde ou La Destinée de l'Homosexuel.*

lay in Christ as a forgiver of sins and sinners, the Christ who preferred that one strayed lamb should be reclaimed before all the rest. A submerged Christian tone is very discernible in the serious parts of the plays, with their emphasis on Atonement, Love and Forgiveness, as opposed to Justice. (The Christianity becomes quite overt in *De Profundis,* of course; but in that strange document Wilde would appear to have simply appropriated Christ to himself, rather than to have shown any real submission to objective Christian doctrine, and the figure of Christ emerges as being disconcertingly like a rather talented pupil of Walter Pater's.) Hence all the serious parts of Wilde's work can, I think, best be seen as a veiled confession; and, paradoxically, the writings of the prophet of 'pure' art are only understandable, are indeed only deeply interesting, because of their suggestive 'impurity' as art—by which I mean the half-hidden personal allegory they contain. In the light of this, I want to examine *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the plays.

The Picture of Dorian Gray would appear to be the gospel according to Walter Pater carried to interesting extremes by his disciple, Wilde. It is prefaced by a series of trumpeting paradoxes to the effect that "Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art," "an ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style" etc.; but the strange thing about this unsuccessful, and in many ways rather silly, jejune book is the moral twist that Wilde gives to what should have been a statement of rampant Immoralism. Let me briefly sum up the story.

Basil Hallward, a serious, dedicated artist, is painting a portrait of Dorian Gray, a handsome young man with whom he has become infatuated. A cynical friend of his, Lord Henry Wotton, the spokesman of the "Aesthetic Life," sees it and begins a systematic corruption of Dorian Gray, so that he shall be the perfect exemplar of the Higher Hedonism; he is so successful that Dorian Gray agrees to sell his soul for eternal youth (the "Faust" parallel, one of the great original statements of Romantic anarchy, must have been in Wilde's mind; one way of seeing Dorian Gray is as the culmination, in rather shop-soiled form, of a long line of Romantic heroes). So the portrait ages, and Dorian Gray can plunge, unscathed, into a riot of elegant—and not so elegant—viciousness. He ends by murdering Basil Hallward, when the latter discovers his *secret;* and the latter part of the

tory takes on a mounting tone of hysterical guilt and remorse. Dorian Gray finally slashes the picture in his agony of mind, and alls dead, and hideous, while the portrait changes to its original outh and beauty.

Firstly, one must agree that Wilde has a magnificent, if slightly nelodramatic, symbol for his theme of a secret life in the fable of the portrait.[9] But what a strange development, and tone, the tory has when one thinks that it is written by the great champion of the Aesthetic Life, of life lived for pleasure and beauty, untrammelled by moral considerations; and, curiously enough, it is the atter part of the book, which deals with Dorian Gray's obsessive emorse and sense of sin that is the most successful. It is still not ood. Wilde seemed incapable of dealing with a serious theme in ther than melodramatic terms; but it is gripping melodrama, y virtue of its sheerly *obsessive* character. The three central haracters, Basil Hallward, the artist, Lord Henry Wotton, the ynical Immoralist, and Dorian Gray himself, are best seen as ramatizations of different aspects of Wilde's own personality. hey certainly do not stand by themselves as convincing creations f character. In that the book has the fault of all second-rate ovels: the characters are all too obviously wish-fulfilments of the uthor's own psychology. Even good novelists draw on the esources of their own personality, along with external observation, n creating imaginary figures; but good novelists usually have a ower of projection which conceals any excessive subjective bias, nd gives their characters vital autonomous lives of their own. Vith *Dorian Gray* this is not the case; Wilde merely gives us haracters who are projections of his own ideals and obsessions.

That is part of the book's failure as a work of art; but as a arely concealed personal allegory it is, of course, illuminating.

Lord Henry Wotton is the Wildean *alter ego,* a stock figure who ccurs in all the plays as well, in various guises. He is the *agreebly* shocking iconoclast, the epigrammatic advocate of self-ealization through sin, a playful Mephistopheles. It is clearly tressed early in the book that he only plays with these ideas on he verbal level; he never acts them out. This is Wilde's projection f himself in his role of irresponsible play-boy—a witty destruc-

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The various sources of it have been exhaustively run to earth in A. J. Farmer's *Le Mouvement Esthétique et "Décadent" en Angleterre* (Paris, 1931).

tive clown, but one who could do no serious harm.

Then there is Basil Hallward. He is the entirely dedicated artist, the kind of being Wilde would have liked to be, but was not; Wilde was very aware of the way in which the easy triumphs of the dinner-table, and the pursuit of pleasure, had marred his artistic development.[10] It is significant, surely, that Dorian Gray should murder Basil Hallward; the man of sinful pleasure destroys the man of art.

Finally, there is Dorian Gray himself, a more complex figure. Clearly, all Wilde's narcissism goes into Dorian Gray, his idealized projection of himself as the innocent beautiful youth; and all his homosexuality, too, his love of epheboid beauty—and psychoanalysts tell us how closely allied narcissistic traits are to homosexuality. But Dorian Gray is not only the beautiful boy of the portrait; he is also the horror that the portrait becomes. The force of this is surely very clear: it expresses Wilde's own sin-stricken awareness of the contrast between what he wished to be and what many thought him—gay, rich, eternally young, at any rate in spirit, blithely unconcerned with conventional judgments, the splendid embodiment of a higher ideal of self-realization—the contrast between all that and what he intimately judged himself to be: vilely deformed by the tyrannous life of the senses. This obsessive guilt at the secret horror of his life directly gives the lie to the light-hearted effrontery of a Lord Henry Wotton, who embodies Wilde's antinomianism in a socially acceptable form. It is significant that when Wilde does try to make Lord Henry a seriously Mephistophelean figure, he fails badly. At its best the latter's charm is of the irresponsible undergraduate variety, which Wilde was to bring to perfection in *The Importance of Being Earnest,* which is quite devoid of serious moral issues; but as a figure of real though fascinating evil, Lord Henry is far too weighed down with decorative affectations to carry any conviction (you cannot be really frightened by a man who is always waving around his "cool, white, flower-like hands" or "arching his dark crescent-shaped eyebrows;" that kind of thing is the side of Wilde which has, perhaps, worn least well). Consequently, when Dorian Gray is shown as being drawn into a vortex of naughty thoughts

[10] This comes out very clearly in *De Profundis:The Complete Text* (London, 1949), where Wilde tries to shuffle off the responsibility for this on to Alfred Douglas. There is much truth in the accusations he makes, but they are basically an evasion.

and evil deeds by this Lord Henry, the whole thing becomes rather silly: Dorian Gray seems just a big, beautiful, callow choir-boy—which is clearly not the effect Wilde *consciously* intended.

If, then, the early part of this book, in particular the relationship between Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray, is a rather shoddy failure, the later parts seem to me to be at any rate an interesting failure. Still a failure because of the melodramatic quality, but interesting because the obsessive tone of it is curiously gripping and suggestive; and its crude 'morality' ending is an odd one for the Arch-Immoralist to have contrived. Hence the real interest of *Dorian Gray* lies in seeing how inadequate were Wilde's theories as the spokesman of Immoralism and the Aesthetic Life to the facts of his own nature. This nature seems to have been partly dominated by the urge to flaunt his 'difference,' hence the Lord Henry Wottons. But in order to give a statement of rebellion against society any serious, tragic significance as well (and it is a great tragic theme, after all), a writer has to be convinced of it himself at the deepest level of his mind, to make it effective. This Wilde could not do. In the first place, his own personal sin was so unavowable that he could only hint at it through situations of a strained hysterical melodrama, in *Dorian Gray* as well as in the plays. Further, he was not really deeply convinced of his right to rebel, so that the reverse side of his exhibitionist wit is a masochistic need to confess, to be judged, *and then to be forgiven and accepted.* This latter need comes out particularly clearly in the three plays written before *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

This intimate self-condemnation was a cause of Wilde's actually courting the disaster of his own life. His life, lived so consciously as a drama, really does show the truth of that remark I quoted earlier: "I have put my genius into my life, and only my talent into my work." Certainly, that life, as a culminating dramatic symbol of the Romantic artist's denial of his society, is a far more achieved and moving thing than anything he ever wrote. When he did achieve perfection as an artist, it was at the cost of writing at a safe remove from any serious issues, namely, in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and, significantly, in his fairy-stories. In all of these there are suggestive themes, if one is on the look-out for them: deformation in 'The Birthday of the Infanta,' rejection by a group in 'The Star Child,' pity for the deprived in 'The Young King,' a double life and an illicit love in 'The Fisherman and the

Soul.' They are beautiful and successful, within the limited scope of the genre, because in them Wilde could objectivize his emotions purely in terms of phantasy, and not in any disturbingly realistic setting. Even his rather mannered, over-decorative prose finds its true home in them too—which is more than one can say of some of its manifestations in *Dorian Gray* and the serious parts of the plays.

Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance and *An Ideal Husband* contain the final aspects of Wilde's work I wish to speak about. They, like *Dorian Gray,* are marred by an irreconcilable cleavage of tone between the frivolous and the melodramatic, and by an inability to give serious expression to an obsessive problem. The conventional account of these plays is that the frivolous, witty social satire, concentrated in the stock *alter ego à la* Lord Henry Wotton, expresses the real Wilde, and that he wrote the serious parts of them with his tongue in his cheek, making use of some of the stock-in-trade of French and late Victorian melodrama. I do not think the matter as simple as that. In the serious central situations of these plays it seems to me that there is an attempt, as in *Dorian Gray,* to objectify a personal obsession; they are illuminating as 'confessions' where they are most unsatisfactory as art. I was cheered to find a hint in André Gide's *Journals* that seems to confirm this view, in an entry where he is speaking of Arthur Ransome's book on Wilde:

> Le livre . . . me paraît bon—et même très bon par endroits. Peutêtre admire-t-il un peu trop les parures dont Wilde aimait à recouvrir sa pensée, et qui continuent à m'apparaître assez factices—et par contre ne montre-t-il pas à quel point les pièces *Un Mari Idéal* et *La Femme de peu d'Importance* sont révélatrices—et j'allais dire: confidentielles—malgré leur apparente objectivité . . . Je voudrais aussi *expliquer* à ma façon l'oeuvre de Wilde et en particulier son théâtre—dont le plus grant intérêt gît entre les lignes.

Gide never did explain more than that, but what can he have been hinting at in these entries? I give a summary of the central situation of each play; and in each, I think, is discernible a recurring pattern of situation, and of characters.

Lady Windermere's Fan. In this play Lady Windermere, a young married woman of impregnable virtue, suspects her husband of having an affair with Mrs Erlynne, the central character of the play. Lady Windermere is on the point of leaving her husband, but is saved from doing so by Mrs Erlynne (who really turns out to be Lady Windermere's mother!)—Mrs Erlynne, who, years ago, through an act of sexual indiscretion, had cut herself off from respectable society. After years of expiating her sin, she saves her daughter, by an act of self-sacrifice, from making a similar mistake. She is re-instated in society and forgiven by Lady Windermere, who seems to embody the moral code of society at its most rigorous.

A Woman of No Importance. The central character is again a woman, Mrs Arbuthnot, the dramatic equivalent of Mrs Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan.* She, too, many years ago, had committed a sexual sin, and has since lived quietly in the country, cut off from society, and successfully concealing her secret. Gerald, the illegitimate son, who is the result of her sin, is suddenly offered a job by Lord Illingworth, Mrs Arbuthnot's original seducer. She forbids him to take it; the secret is revealed; but Mrs Arbuthnot is forgiven by her son's fiancée, Hester Worsley, on account of the suffering whereby she has expiated her sin. And this Hester Worsley is, like Lady Windermere in the other play, the very embodiment of idealistic morality.

An Ideal Husband. In this play the central character is a man, Sir Robert Chiltern, but he is the equivalent in dramatic function of Mrs Erlynne and Mrs Arbuthnot in the other two plays. He is married to a wife of rigid, idealistic virtue (the dramatic equivalent of Lady Windermere and Hester Worsley in the other two plays). An adventuress, Mrs Cheveley, threatens to reveal a political secret from Sir Robert's past. His wife discovers all, but Sir Robert is spared public disgrace by various complications of the plot; and this wife, the embodiment of social respectability, is brought to see the necessity of forgiving and accepting someone who has sinned against the moral code of society, and suffered on that account.

In each play there is a secret in the life of the central character, which, if revealed, would bring ruin and social ostracism. In two of the plays this secret is a sexual one; and in the other play *(An Ideal Husband)* the dramatic point of the secret is that, behind a façade of success, wealth and brilliance, in Sir Robert

Chiltern's life lies an appalling moral stain. In each play there are continual references—some flippant, some not—to secrecy, double lives, masks. In each play, too, the central scene is that in which the sinner confesses his sin and makes an impassioned plea for forgiveness and acceptance, on account of the moral suffering whereby the sin has been expiated, in prose of rather the same strained, hysterical quality one finds in the later parts of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is always a plea for Love, in place of Justice. Wilde gives it an openly Christian tone in at least one play, *A Woman of No Importance,* thereby hinting at the whole problem of reconciling certain aspects of New Testament Christianity with the judgements and punishments of society. This impassioned plea for love and forgiveness by the strayed lamb is always made to a woman — Lady Windermere, Hester Worsley, Lady Chiltern—who embodies the standards of social morality at their most rigorous and idealistic. But what Wilde does in the characterization of these women is to make them, from the beginning, almost ridiculous, certainly *obtuse* in their idealistic virtue, so that the scales are ever so subtly weighted against them in favour of the sinner. Hence, when the time for confession and forgiveness comes, it will not bring just a concession from the virtuous to the vicious, but a necessary leavening of the virtuous from Justice to Love. The sinner is a sinner; but society, as embodied in Lady Windermere, Hester Worsley and Lady Chiltern, is not perfect, is tainted with a slightly hypocritical obtuseness. Everything is resolved however in a kind of redemptory glow.

There is one final point to notice: in all these plays there occurs another pattern character—Lord Darlington in *Lady Windermere's Fan,* Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance,* and Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband;* each is the equivalent of Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* each represents the frivolous iconoclastic side of Wilde's nature. It is worth noting that in the first two plays Wilde tries to give a serious tone to their Immoralism, just as he had tried to make Lord Henry a seriously Mephistophelean figure; and once again the attempt fails; whereas in the last play, *An Ideal Husband,* Lord Goring is much more a charming irresponsible undergraduate, the eternal younger son—he is a sketch, in fact, for the young men in *The Importance of Being Earnest.* I must emphasize that I have been making no claim for the success of these plays in their serious parts. The

way in which those pattern-situations are contrived, the recurrent similarities of tone between them, are all, I think, highly significant, when taken in conjunction with what one knows of Wilde's life and character, and with other parts of his work; but they are a great bore and embarrassment, aesthetically. These plays will always be acted simply for their wit, their social satire, their gay iconoclasm—all that side of Wilde which glittered so brightly and acceptably for shocked, indulgent audiences.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest* there were no flaws apparent. I cannot resist pointing out that the plot of this play also contains a double life and a secret. (Is Lady Bracknell perhaps another figure of placated female virtue, or Britannia Appeased!) But the tone of the whole play is never once allowed to become serious. The theme of concealment and a double life is reduced—or rather, lifted—to a plane where the judgements and punishments of real life have no validity. In that it is like all farce, and all idyll. It may be recognizably late Victorian England, where trains run on the Brighton line, where tea is brought into the garden, and where the butler may announce Lady Bracknell at any moment; but the consequences of words and behaviour are never those which could attach to them in reality. Jack will find his parents, Lady Bracknell will forgive everybody, and everybody will be young and happy and witty always.

It is in *The Importance of Being Earnest* only that Wilde completely succeeds as an artist—the conventional judgement is the right one. In it he is at his funniest, his most charming, his most lovable. That, oddly enough, is the quality which Wilde would suggest most—lovableness. All who knew him testify to it; but it is the love and admiration we extend to someone very brilliant, but not quite grown-up. He is, eternally and essentially, the charming, witty, rebellious adolescent, who fails tragically in the encounter with reality and finds his true creative self only in phantasy; for *The Importance of Being Earnest,* let us make no mistake, is as much phantasy as the fairy-tales are.

A PLEA FOR THE PROPAGATION OF MINOR POETRY

RICHARD MORTON

ALONG the shelves of the local university and public libraries can be found troops of minor English poets—names, as the critics say, known only to historians. A glance at the library slip inside the books will nearly always tell the same story of years' neglect.

Much has been written in the pages of this journal about the problems of teaching literature in South African universities. Perhaps a few words about a peripheral problem will not be amiss. It is clear that many, probably most, of our students do not read any book which is not either on their course or acknowledged as a masterpiece. I believe that there are three reasons for this, and also three reasons why our students might well find exploration into minor writers worth their while.

First, it seems that we are in danger of oversolemnizing literary studies. A recent work, much read by students, states that "a lifetime is too short for anyone (if he reflects) to wish to dissipate his time on anything less good than what Arnold once called 'the best that is known and thought in the world.' " This not uncommon and, superficially, not unreasonable attitude is unique with literary art. Masaccio is not scorned because of the proximity of Michelangelo, and the music critics are always glad of a chance to hear some neglected work, even if it is not a Beethoven quartet. It is possible that the literary critic's horror of wasting his time is a result of an English puritanical conscience, compensating for a life spent in the frivolous pursuit of poetry.

Our masterpiece-loaded syllabuses may breed a generation of students with their minds on the clock—students whose time 'really matters' and who, with the light shining out of their eyes, like Grendel or Jeeves, read only *King Lear* and the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Professor Durrant has said, with customary wisdom, that "Students who do not know Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Dickens, Jane Austen and Donne should not spend much time on Middleton, Cowley, Thomson, Peacock and Tourneur." But the alternative danger is also present—that the student spends

no time reading the lesser names, that he is not encouraged to fill in such spare moments as he has with minor writers. It might be sound discipline for teachers to prohibit in themselves for a specific number of weeks or lectures such phrases as "Of course, Shakespeare . . ." or "Whereas in *Middlemarch* . . ." and substitute something that the students do not know and could hardly guess, such as "Charles Churchill is very good at . . ." or "In one of Dekker's most entertaining plays . . ." Thomson is easier to read than Pope, Cowley easier than Milton (perhaps just because they are lesser poets), but our students do not seem to find out that it is possible to read from *The Seasons* for ten minutes, or to read some of the poems in *The Mistress* while waiting for a bus. The only poetry they read is difficult, subtle stuff, so the impression grows that poems are to be read gravely, even ritualistically, at a library desk with notebook in hand. Poetry becomes a business deal, with time *spent* on it.

A second force moving against the reading of lesser works affects principally the less-than-good student. The unavoidable tendency to concentrate on the set works leads to the well-known gambit, "I've read *Emma* four times and . . ." The student knows everything in the book (that is to say, he could recount every twist of the action) but he is quite unaware of what Jane Austen is doing. The suggestion that the student might rather read *Emma* twice and then, say, *Northanger Abbey* and *Evelina* (a precise time/energy expenditure alternative) and see what happens, is not welcomed. While he reads Fanny Burney his friend is crawling up the margins and between the lines of *Emma,* staking out claims for certain examination marks. We should perhaps stress more strongly the fact that so much of the understanding of literature is a question of familiarity with a convention, which can certainly not be taught in lectures and seminars, and can only be absorbed by wide reading. A play by Cibber or Farquhar may be quite mystifying if we have not been reading sentimental comedies for some time. But after a few weeks' study of the form we can read rapidly and with full comprehension and enjoyment through the most complex and disguise-ridden intrigues. Students, of course, have not time to read several novels of Jane Austen, Dickens or Thackeray, let alone minor writers, but there is no reason why they should not slip into their pockets for odd reading some of the minor lyric poets.

A third reason for the neglect of minor writers affects the good students principally. Studying only the masterpieces and talking only of the great tradition, the student becomes used to the well-signposted road. He can study Wordsworth because he feels the comfort of fellow-travellers—he knows that any information he may require can be readily obtained. There is no danger of his getting lost. But at the same time the observant student is aware of the vast number of works of which he is ignorant and to which he knows no ready introduction. All too often he is repulsed by the complexity of the unknown and takes refuge in a general scorn—usually a most uncritical scorn. Clear signs of a type of despairing ignorance are sometimes found in the work of even the best students. Sentences such as "We do not need to concern ourselves with Thomas Toke Lynch, Menella Bute Smedley or Coventry Patmore" are the good student's version of the bad student's "Wordsworth was indebted to Erasmus and Darwin" or "In Browning's great poem *The Ibid* . . ." However valuable time is, it can always be found, apparently, to read and misunderstand the histories of literature.

The good student may well be frightened by the jungle of unknown works—our best service to him will be to suggest that the jungle is not impenetrable and that he might well put aside a little time for exploration.

* * * *

The importance of minor poets has been stressed in an elegant lecture by Professor H. W. Donner: "Minor poets are easier to know familiarly in their works, and . . . years of intimacy with one of them may give us some little knowledge of the workings of the creative spirit in their minds, and so of the poetic mind in general."[1] At the moment we are not concerned with the years of intimacy so much as with the hours, or even minutes of delight and instruction which our students may gain from minor writers. Two suggested reasons for the encouragement of exploration can be justified in terms of the fashionable belief that the student's main concern is concentration on the great writer. For, first, we cannot be aware of the nature of poetic greatness unless we have some scale of comparison. A literary student may cling to Miranda as his patron:

[1]H. W. Donner in *English Studies Today* (Oxford, 1951).

My affections
Are then most humble; I have no ambition
To see a goodlier man.

But even she is delighted by the variety which subsequently presents itself:

O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is!

A familiarity, however slight, with minor poets is essential for the true assessment of the achievement of major writers.

A neat example of how minor writers can help the student to see what the major poet is driving at is provided by the analogues to Crashaw's famous poem, *Musicks Duell.* Mr Austin Warren calls this piece the "secular triumph of the Crashavian style,"[2] and his comment on the synaesthetic imagery is acute and penetrating. The student, with Mr Warren's help, is well able to appreciate the effect of the parallels—the nightingale's notes are like the fledglings forsaking their nest, there are whirlwinds and earthquakes within the nightingale's throat, the song trips in a dance, or the sounds march like an army to war. What the student finds more difficult to realize is what Crashaw does not do. Having neither a wide reading of poetry nor the creative skill of the poet, how is the young reader to realize what is inherent in the theme but omitted in the treatment? A poet's evasions can be as important as his fulfilments. If the student looks at Strada's original poem he will realize how Crashaw has underplayed the effect of the three parts to the contest — why does Crashaw blur this apparently essential narrative structure, which his contemporary, William Strode, preserved in his close and harmonious translation of the Latin? A glance at the version of the theme in John Ford's play, *The Lover's Melancholy,* shows the tale dressed up as a picturesque fiction. "The sweetest and most ravishing contention," "The young man grew at last into a pretty anger," "It was the quaintest sadness": the decadent pastoral melancholy is not found in Crashaw's version and yet, when Ford has pointed it out to us, we realize that it is an obvious property of the fable. Ambrose Phillips uses the story in his fifth pastoral, which is notable for an

[2] *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Ann Arbor, 1939).

almost complete absence of metaphor in his description of the sound and for an extensive use of technical terms to define the music:

> Still more and more the numbers multiply:
> And now they trill, and now they fall and rise,
> And swift and slow they change with sweet surprise.

More significantly, Phillips makes the tale a moral allegory of the nightingale, "jealous, and fond of praise," and the winning musician with his "guilty harp" and "wicked strings." Phillips draws our attention to the moral comment at the end of Strada's poem, neglected by Crashaw, and shows how it can be made central to the piece. The student's attention might also be drawn to a use of the fable by a certain J.M. at the close of the eighteenth century.[3] A close, trim translation of Strada, its breathlessness and jerky forward movement are undoubted signs of the small poet working at the height of his power. The simple technical competence of the other versions is made startlingly clear by comparison with this piece. And the student who reads it will also gain, as an extra profit, a vivid idea of what inimical critics meant when they attacked poetic diction: "verdant mead," "summer's heat," "songster of the wood," "artful skill," "smooth cadence," "warbling strains." It might be profitable to wonder why the theme has suddenly petrified at this point in literary history—it is surely not just that J.M. is a lesser poet than Stroud or Phillips. There is such a thing as literary dynamics. Strada's poem is exhausted and the contest is over.

I do not believe that the student can, in any real sense, appreciate the positive achievement of Crashaw's poem, or even see what the poet is trying to do, without some awareness of how other, and lesser writers have gone about the task. The minors, through their lack of subtlety, can be followed much more easily. Like tracer bullets, they may lack penetration, but they mark out the path. *Musicks Duell* is unusual in having so many obvious parallels, but few poems are unique in subject and treatment, and the student who thumbs through minor poets will constantly find instructive comparisons.

A second reason for the study of minor writers will need little amplification. So much of what is best in our literature is written

[3]In *Gentleman's Magazine*, August, 1791.

in accordance with conventions which have since been modified out of recognition. Students confronted with a conventional work have no method of criticism and tend to base their comments on some vaguely realized concept of 'real life'. Regular in appearance in the essays of young students are such phrases as "The ending of *The School for Scandal* is unconvincing," or "Jane Austen's dialogue is artificial." The formalities of Spenser and Milton are quite prodigious. It is generally true in English literature, though not, I fancy, in other literatures, that the greatest writers have tended to use conventions in a cavalier way. Major works at once idiosyncratic and orthodox are not uncommon. English criticism, too, has sometimes tended to scorn the conventional elements, and students who are ready to appreciate the direct person to person address of the poet are baffled by the formality. *Lycidas* is a notorious example. There is a possible danger that students will develop a partisan appreciation, and will misjudge certain aspects of a writer's work. The student will like (that is, understand) *The Pardoner's Tale,* but not *The Clerk's Tale; Paradise Lost,* but not *Paradise Regain'd.* Moreover, much of the ironic effect gained by the tension between the formal and the informal in, say, Goldsmith or Burns or Byron is missed. Here, the minor writers provide the essential helpful clues. The subtly varied diction of Gray's *Elegy* is overlooked by the student who has never come across the less elusive modulations of Thomson or Dyer.

Some major poems, of course, observe the limits of very rigid conventions, and are consequently neglected or misunderstood. Pope's *Windsor Forest* is one of the masterpieces of eighteenth-century poetry, but one little known to students. It lacks a personal voice, but in its formal imposition of discipline, of historical and topographical unity, on the things it describes it achieves an imaginative creation of a significant world. It will be a sad day when such a work loses relevance for modern readers. Even if such poems as Denham's *Cooper's Hill* were not worth reading on their own account, they would be a necessary and valuable introduction to the convention which Pope is here adorning.

So far we have dealt with the minor poets as a practical aid to the understanding of the major poets, in accordance with the dictum, "Only the masterpieces really justify the amount of time spent in literary study." The suggestion is merely that our students

be encouraged to make excursions into the jungle of literature to bring back supplies for the besieged and isolated great poets. But we could also stress the delights of browsing through the libraries, of experimenting with unknown writers — of reading something other than murders or science fiction for recreation. Most minor poets are less demanding than Donne or Blake, but though the output of effort need not be great the rewards are not small. Almost all the little poets offer something well worth reading, and when that something is found it is the student's discovery. He is not merely confirming by his own experience what he has read in the journals or heard in lectures. Novelty is a major aspect of an aesthetic experience and must not be exclusively replaced by the shock of recognition.

It may also be a good thing for our students to get into the habit of reading works divorced from the stern duty of the syllabus. Veneration is tedious and often unnecessary. It does not matter much if the student never finishes *Davideis* — after all, neither did Cowley.

It will be noted that in the course of this essay no attempt has been made to define the terms *minor poet* and *minor poetry*. The omission is deliberate. Any clear distinction between minor poet and poetaster would automatically prepare the way for the cattle-show method of criticism—the comparison of values which is such a bleak pastime. Students of the fortunes of Troy will recollect that Paris's task was not to be solved by practical criticism: nor was evaluation the end of the affair. For minor poet, therefore, *read* poet the student has not thought of looking at—whether he is as well known as Waller, as esteemed as Samuel Rogers, as neglected as Gilbert West or as forgotten as the Rev. John Adamthwaite, M.A., D.D. The essential thing is the hopeful journey, the enthusiastic experiment with unknown materials. Mr Graham Hough tells a good story. "I once knew a man in a prison camp who divided his copy of Wordsworth's poems into two halves, retained the first, and swapped the second for the bottom half of a pair of pyjamas. He rightly judged that the intellectual loss was very slight."

The hero of the tale is, I fancy, the soldier who ventured half his pyjamas for the disparaged poems.

A NOTE ON CAPE ENGLISH IDIOM

LOUIS HERRMAN

THE examples noted below are taken from ordinary English speech at the Cape, though the words, expressions or usages are probably not confined to the Western Province. I have not labelled them South African English Idiom, because my continuous experience of English speech in other parts of South Africa is scanty compared with my observation of it for more than fifty years at the Cape.

1. *Stay.*
   He *stays* in Wynberg.
   He lives in Wynberg.
   To stay, in the sense of to reside temporarily, is not used in Cape idiom.

2. *Sleep over.*
   When I go to see my uncle in Paarl, I *sleep over.*
   When . . . . . , I stay the night (or overnight).

3. *Does not want to.*
   This knife *does not want to* cut.
   This knife will not (or won't) cut.
   The car *does not want to* start.
   The car won't start.

4. *Already.*
   Some had taken their places in the queue the previous night, *already.*
   Some had already taken . . . . . the previous night.
   Already at the end of a sentence is rare in English, except for special emphasis. In Cape idiom it is frequently tacked on to the end of a sentence, often with no obvious meaning.

5. *Around.*
   We lost our way and wandered *around* the veld helplessly.
   We lost . . . . . wandered about the . . . . . .

(Cf. American. Probably imported via films, records, comic strips etc.)

I looked *around* for my brother. He had gone.

I looked round for . . . . . .

Round the house and *Around the house* express different meanings in English idiom. Cape idiom uses the one word *around* indiscriminately. A South African daily newspaper heads its 'slosh page' 'Around the Town' to indicate, not the environs or suburbs of the town, but the heart of its social life.

6. *Couple.*

I will do the job in a *couple* of days.

I will do the job in a few days.

(A contractor promised me to start work 'in a couple of days. It was then Monday. On Wednesday he did not appear. Arriving on the Friday he indignantly denied that he had not kept his promise. He understood a couple as 'a few'.)

7. *A few.*

The visitors scored *a few* goals before half-time.

The visitors scored several goals before half-time.

A few in Cape idiom signifies 'an indefinite number', though not, as in English, smaller than might be expected.

8. *Books.*

She provided herself with *Woman's World, Panorama* and other *books* for the journey.

She provided . . . . . and other magazines (or pamphlets, journals, papers, etc.) for the journey.

Books in Cape idiom is not confined to substantial printed publications usually cloth bound, but is extended to all those classes of reading matter mentioned above.

9. *Just now.*

I will attend to that matter *just now.*

I will attend to that matter presently.

10. *Presently.*
The estate is *presently* in the hands of the executors.
The estate is at present . . . . . .
The archaic *presently* is creeping into use, perhaps from legal English.

11. *Second last.*
Jack came last and his brother *second last.*
Jack came last and his brother last but one (or one before last).
Second last is Scottish (a legacy, perhaps, of the generation of Scottish teachers under Sir Thomas Muir).

12. *Sore head.*
My head is *sore.* I have a *sore head.*
My head aches. I have a headache.
Sore head in English idiom mostly implies a wound or a disease of the scalp.

13. *Blue eye.*
He emerged from the fight with a *blue eye.*
He . . . . . black eye.

14. *To tramp.*
By accident he *tramped* on my toes.
By . . . . . trod on my toes.

15. *Must.*
Must I open the door for you?
Shall I open the door for you?
The idea of compulsion in the word *must* is frequently absent in the Cape idiom.

16. *Sick.*
During the night he was *sick.*
During the night he was ill.
To be sick in English idiom commonly signifies 'to vomit'.

17. *Bioscope.*
Cape English for Cinema or Picture House.
The first cinema in Cape Town was Wolfram's Bioscope at the foot of Adderley Street. Hence the word.

18. *Tickey.*
Universal South African for threepenny bit; its etymology is unknown.

19. *Bottle Store.*
Universal South African for a wine merchant's shop or the English 'Off-Licence'.

20. *Fishery or fisheries.*
The equivalent in English is 'fish shop', though 'fisheries' has been introduced in recent years.

21. *Butchery.*
The equivalent in English is 'butcher shop' or 'butcher's shop'. The word *butchery* may be applied in English to a slaughter house, but rarely, if ever, is it used for a place where meat is sold. (The Cape use probably owes its origin to analogy with Afrikaans *slagtery.*)

22. *Negatives.*
I *don't hope* they will be late !
I hope they won't be late !
I *don't hope* so.
I hope not.
I'll find out if he *won't* go with us.
I'll find out if he will go with us.

23. *Also.*
My brother is coming *also.*
My brother is coming as well.

24. Certain forms that are 'genteelisms' in English are common usage in Cape idiom:
Serviette, a 'genteelism' for 'table napkin', has entirely replaced the latter word in Cape idiom.
Similarly, all places that might be described in English as tea-shops are *cafés* in the Cape (commonly pronounced 'caffy').

25. American words have made more headway in this country than in English idiom:
Store has been substituted for the English word 'shop'.
Pants has ousted 'trousers'.

("Thou callest trousers 'pants', whereas I call them 'trousers'.
Therefore thou art in hell-fire and may the Lord pity thee!
O God! O Montreal!")

26. Two exclamations:
In the Cape a child being hurt exclaims: *Eh-na!* equivalent to the English 'Ooh!' or 'Ooh-er!'
Women and children on beholding something small and endearing, a kitten, a puppy, a baby, exclaim: *Shame!* an exclamation used in English only to express strong disapproval!

27. There are also in common use in South Africa words of which there is mostly no exact English equivalent. Major J. Bromwich, who has collected a large number of them, courteously showed his list to me. Included in it are:
appraiser (valuer)
beacon (landmark)
bond (mortgage)
boy (native manservant)
brack (salt, brackish)
camp (enclosed field)
commonage (common land)
furrow (irrigation ditch)
ground (land)
lands (fields)
sand (earth, soil)
lounge (living room)
mealies (maize)
pondokkie (hut)
hok (pen)
skellum (rogue)
skolly (ruffian)
rains (rain)

* * *

The sub-editor, Professor W. H. Gardner, comments on the above examples as follows:

A distinction should surely be made between 'educated' and 'vulgar' speech. Many of the South African expressions listed here are merely clumsy or crude. By standards that are truly English,

pants *for* trousers, *the confusion of* must *and* shall, couple *and* few, *are execrable vulgarisms. Should we try to impede or to encourage the corruption of English?*

Must it be said that in this country, where Afrikaans aims more and more at purity and precision, English is allowed to become more lax and woolly? My own experience of well-educated English-speaking South Africans is that, apart from just now *and a few similar peculiarities, the majority of them speak, and* want *to speak, an English as near to standard as possible: they are not of a mind to say of their English, as Touchstone said of his awkward Audrey, "A poor thing, sir, but mine own." On the whole, however, I'm afraid it must be said, and said plainly, that too few English speakers really care what happens to English. In this age of "mass education and minority culture", immediate comfort, easy and often vulgar amusement, and a sense of power are what count most. Man is still more than half barbarous; hence the destiny of a people, or a language, tends to be shaped rather more by the baser elements in a nation than by the higher. In a world which craves and so copiously provides the means for more unity, it seems to me a mistake and indeed futile to assume, as some people do, that climatic, racial and other conditions in South Africa make it necessary for South Africa to 'evolve' its own peculiar dialect of English.*

Of course, we all know, and freely allow, that a vigorous living language must change and grow. Neologisms or new forms are to be welcomed when they add something of value, meet some new need, accommodate some necessary social, economic or scientific innovation; but they should do this without detracting in any way from the precision or expressiveness of the language.

[The Editor is in agreement with the above point of view.]

SIR WALTER GREG

A. C. PARTRIDGE

The sudden, but peaceful, death of Sir Walter Greg at his country retreat Tanner's Knap, River, Petworth, Sussex, removed from the world of English scholarship and bibliography one of its most notable figures. He was the son of a wealthy political economist of the nineteenth century, and, like the Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardiner, was left in sufficiently affluent circumstances to devote his time to the study of book-making, printing and publishing in its earlier history. He was fortunate, too, in being sent to Trinity College, Cambridge, where there was housed the magnificent Capell collection of early Shakespeare editions, and in meeting there William Aldis Wright, the first of the two major scholars whom Cambridge has given to modern Shakespearian editing.

Like most bibliographers, Greg led a solitary life, researching among early printed books in the older university libraries and the British Museum. He had kindred workers and friends in R. B. McKerrow and A. W. Pollard, and the trio became a formidable force in the application of bibliography to textual scholarship, especially to the work of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Greg realized that a principal handicap to fruitful textual scholarship was the lack of accurate editions, and he founded the Malone Society, which has enjoyed, under his austerely scientific guidance, a remarkable life of service to textual studies.

Sir Walter possessed the most exacting precision of mind and unrelenting logic of expression of any scholar I have known. He perceived what facts were central and relevant, and what locutions were mere verbiage, in less time than half a dozen literary critics. His mind was lucid, systematic and practical, and his pen economical and pointed, so that his meaning and intention were always unmistakeable. No man has amassed such a range of heterogeneous information with so remarkable a capacity for marshalling evidence impartially and intelligibly. He kept that arch-enemy of the history of textual transmission, conjecture, in its proper place, never pretending to make the available evidence fit a pre-conceived theory. He was a model, in what he edited, of minute accuracy and skilful

interpretation, and his work on *Shakespeare's Hand in Sir Thomas More* alone gained him an enviable reputation.

Among his greatest contributions to scholarship must be reckoned his *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses,* which revolutionized our knowledge of the early stage and its literature, and *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare,* with its salutary warnings to editors with notions of rigid adherence to substantive texts. As a textual critic, Sir Walter believed, with Whitehead, that an editor should "seek simplicity but distrust it"; there was no escape from the use of his own judgment to solve every crucial problem. Greg's single-minded devotion to his task brought such late and prodigious feats as his reconstruction of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus,* his *Shakespeare First Folio,* an indispensable compendium for all Shakespearian scholars, and *London Publishing Between 1550 and 1650,* which appeared only three years ago, and surveyed with masterly observation the intricacies of the Stationers' Records, Licensing for the Press and Elizabethan Copyright.

Here was a man of mathematical integrity, yet humanistic breadth of mind. He gave most generous help to friend and stranger, patiently scrutinizing their lucubrations and unerringly dissecting the fallacies in their arguments. He earned many disciples and admirers, men who owe much to his pioneering, such as Professors J. Dover Wilson, F. P. Wilson and Fredson Bowers. That bibliography has advanced to its present complexity and usefulness in literary detection was due largely to Greg and his allies. They lived in the Golden Age, and the specialists who now reign readily acknowledge the guiding hand of the old master.

To spend an evening with Sir Walter after a long day of textual minutiae was a genuine relaxation. He loved to listen to well produced radio-drama, especially if the playwright belonged to his youth, such as Granville Barker, Shaw, Jones or Robertson. He said little, but the spoken word had its appreciative reception in every critical line of his face. It is to the enormous credit of modern democratic government that his unforgettable contributions to scholarship were honoured with a knighthood.

Illius excelsos per libros fama vigebit.

READERS' FORUM

THE POETIC DRAMA OF T. S. ELIOT.

The Editor,
English Studies in Africa.

Dear Sir,

I was most interested in the article by Father Jarrett-Kerr on "The Poetic Drama of T. S. Eliot" (Vol. 2, No. 1; March, 1959). I agree entirely with his judgment that "*The Family Reunion* seems to me, in spite of Eliot's own disclaimers, the best play he has written"; and it appears to me valid to stress the probable influence of Claudel's long-lined poetry upon Eliot's choruses. Father Jarrett-Kerr's further comparison, with Whitman's *When Lilacs Last,* is, however, even more interesting to me in connection with another analogy: that is in the affinities which *The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral,* and *The Family Reunion* have, in certain respects, with Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* and *Within the Gates,* for O'Casey himself has often spoken of his long acquaintance with the poetry of Whitman and of the Bible.

Naturally, I am not comparing Eliot and O'Casey for content, where there is much that is dissimilar, but for choric technique. If we look at isolated examples of O'Casey's chorus work we may note similarities with Eliot's early practice:

CROUCHER

Thirty days hath September, April, June and
November —
November — that's the month when I was born —
November.
Not the beginning, not the end, but the middle of
November.
Near the valley of the Thames, in the middle of
November.
Shall I die at the start, near the end, in the middle of
November?

1ST SOLDIER (*nodding towards the Croucher*):

One more scrap, an' he'll be
Ay one in the kingdom of the bawmy.

2ND SOLDIER
Perhaps they have forgotten.

3RD SOLDIER
Forgotten.

4TH SOLDIER
Forgotten us.

1ST SOLDIER
If the blighters at the front would tame their grousing.

THE REST
Tame their grousing.

2ND SOLDIER
And the wounded cease to stare their silent scorning.

THE REST
Passing by us, carried cushy on the stretchers.

3RD SOLDIER
We have beaten out the time upon the duckboard.

4TH SOLDIER
Stiff standing watch'd the sunrise from the firestep.

2ND SOLDIER
Stiff standing from the firestep watch'd the sunset.

3RD SOLDIER
Have bless'd the dark wiring of the top with curses.

2ND SOLDIER
And never a ray of leave.

3RD SOLDIER
To have a quiet drunk.

1ST SOLDIER
Or a mad mowment to rustle a judy.

Yet this passage is taken from the second act of *The Silver Tassie,* written eight years before *Murder in the Cathedral.* And if we examine some of O'Casey's verse exercises printed in *Windfalls* in 1934 we may see further possible parallels. Other examples of O'Casey's varied choric line are to be found in *Within the Gates,* written in 1933:

CHORUS

Our mother the Earth is a maiden again, young, fair, and a maiden again.
Her thoughts are a dance as she seeks out her bridegroom,
the sun, through the lovely confusion of singing of birds, and of blossom and bud.
She feels the touch of his hand on her hair, on her cheeks; in the budding of trees.
She feels the kiss of his love on her mouth, on her breast, as she dances along.

and, Sc. 1

DOWN-AND-OUTS (*chanting*)

We challenge life no more, no more, with our dead faith and our dead hope;
We carry furl'd the fainting flags of a dead hope and a dead faith.
Day Sings no song, neither is there room for rest beside night in her sleeping:
We've but a sigh for a song, and a deep sigh for a drum-beat!

DREAMER

Sorrow and pain we shall have, and struggle unending:
We shall weave courage with pain, and fight through the struggle unending.
Way for the strong and the swift and the fearless:
Life that is stirr'd with the fear of its life, let it die;
Let it sink down, let it die, and pass from our vision for ever!

Sc. 4

O'Casey once told me, when I spoke to him of possible affinities with Eliot's choruses, that he did not know whether Eliot knew *The Silver Tassie,* but he did know that Eliot had seen the first London production of *Within the Gates* in 1934 in the company of Mr Martin Shaw, who had directed the choral chanting in the 1929 London production of *The Silver Tassie.* Shaw had later told O'Casey that Eliot had been "impressed" by the choric speech of *Within the Gates.* This interested me because I had long been fascinated by the very different approach of O'Casey in that play from that of Eliot in *The Family Reunion*: both plays have thematic similarities, but totally opposed conclusions. One is not surprised by Eliot's interest in *Within the Gates* at the time: its

use of ritual to realize themes of contemporary significance, its mixture of choric and individualized characterisation and its restoration to the theatre of the compression and vitality of poetry (not only in the lyrics set to music, but in passages that have the shape of prose) were obviously relevant. Moreover, *Within the Gates,* on one level, is a search for salvation in the modern world. It attempts to realize this by using Christian symbols, but at the same time it rejects orthodox Christianity. Five years later *The Family Reunion* appeared, a play which — again, on one level — is also concerned with a contemporary search for salvation. I do not think for one moment that Eliot was *consciously* reacting against O'Casey's conclusions; but certainly it is interesting to study the two plays as diametrically opposed treatments of a basic theme.

Bearing in mind certain of these affinities, I was surprised that, when Eliot noted in *Poetry and Drama* those modern prose playwrights close to poetic drama, he instanced Ibsen and Checkov, but did not mention O'Casey. Knowing the Irish dramatist's consistent praise for Eliot's poetry and his early drama, I was gratified recently to receive a letter from the poet (dated July 20th, 1959) taking up some of these points. Mr Eliot concludes generously:

> ". . . I was indeed very much interested by *Within the Gates.* I didn't think it altogether a success, as I felt that his hand was not quite so sure in dealing with English characters as with Irish ones, and the bishop in that play I remember as particularly improbable. What impressed me particularly was the more poetic aspect of the play and the use of choral effect which seemed to me brilliant. Yet I think his earlier plays like *The Silver Tassie* much finer than *Within the Gates.* It is possible, however, that *Within The Gates* may have had some subconscious influence on me when I was writing *The Family Reunion.* . . . It's interesting that you should find an artistic affinity between two men who are so far apart politically as O'Casey and myself. In view of the latter fact, it is pleasant to think that we have a very high opinion of each other's work."

RONALD AYLING.

Rhodes University,
Grahamstown.
29 July, 1959.

EXAMINATIONS IN ENGLISH

Dear Sir,

In Part III of the symposium on 'Examinations in English'[1] the writer, Mr A. D. Hall, proceeded from the question "How should we examine?" to the more important question "How should we teach?" or, as he would prefer, "What should students read?" Your correspondents did not explicitly 'rise' to his attack on what may be called the modern approach to English studies in universities, but I am moved to defend what I understand by it.

Much of what Mr Hall says about the defects of students 'turned out' in the newer way is justified, but these defects should be admitted—more, pointed out—by people convinced of the values of the modern approach, *and remedied*. They should not be left to its detractors to produce as trump cards. On the subject of textual analysis, I share Mr Hall's doubts that anyone can justly "infer the whole skeleton from a single bone" (1 (2) p. 160); in dealing with major works by the method of selected passages, admiration for a great author does tempt a lecturer to overstate his case for what is typical, or what is deliberately integral to the whole, in the passage set. To deal in 'practical criticism' classes with passages detached from works unknown to the students is risky, because it is virtually impossible not to draw without due acknowledgment upon evidence available to the lecturer but not to the students. I believe that textual analysis within the framework of a prescribed syllabus is the most valuable.

Again, like Mr Hall, I have known graduates unable to 'place' major authors within fifty years, but this regrettable ignorance has not made me doubt the value of intensive reading. Ignorance can be remedied. It has not altered my conviction that close attention to the specific text on the page in front of one is the best training in literary values; the best exercise of responsiveness to verbal stimulus, in the classroom; and the best test of students' knowledge and mental powers, in the examination room.

On the actual subject of examinations and whether to set textual or essay-type questions, Mr Hall is scathing in his presentation of his opponent's views:

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[1] A. D. Hall, 'Examinations in English (III),' *English Studies in Africa* 1(2) 57-63, 1958. Parts I and II appeared in Vol. 1, No. 1 and Correspondence in Vol. 2, No. 1.

> The case seems to be this: that an essay-type question on *King Lear* is inadmissible, but that the same question when yoked to a gobbet has multiple virtues. (1 (2) p. 153)

I submit (lightly) that this barbed and apparently devastating sentence is a good text for a demonstration of the modern approach to an author. There is an answer to it—namely, that the "virtues" ("multiple" or not) do exist: they reside in the requirement that the student should comment in detail on the "gobbet," and in general on the whole play, *and* make the one comment relevant to the other. As Mr Hall himself says (in the last paragraph on p. 153) there is no better test of intellectual competence than relevance. Why then should he refuse to see the virtues of yoking an essay on *King Lear* to a gobbet?

To answer this question, one comments on the vocabulary of his witty sally. There is an elaborate incredulity, ironically implying that Mr Hall is afraid he may have misunderstood Professor Durrant's "case," in the phrase "seems to be." There is the suggestion in the word "yoked," that an enforced linking, involving strain, has been effected. The choking distaste in "gobbet;" the glib tone of facile superiority attributed, by the use of the pretentious phrase "multiple virtues," to the person who selected the gobbet and yoked it to the essay, supply further evidence that Mr Hall is deliberately unjust. (I hope he feels sure that students who read extensively are aware of subtleties like those above?) They show he does not *want* to see any virtues in Professor Durrant's methods of examining and directs readers to see none, because he sees none in the Professor's methods of teaching, and even finds him wrong in wanting to teach — although Mr Hall agrees that students know nothing.

But to state seriously my objections to Mr Hall's views. His generalizations about young students, their needs and what attitudes it behoves them to adopt, seem condescending and educationally unsound. He writes of the aims of literary studies as if they were definable in terms of the subject of study only, apart from the students; and this makes his arguments against textual analysis unacceptable. Finally, he follows Professor Durrant in omitting all mention of the role of English language in the English department.

On the subject of the students, I am content to endorse what Miss van Heyningen wrote:

> I do not share Mr Hall's low opinion of the capacities of the students . . . the student must be trained to use his judgment and to trust it. (2 (1) p. 135)

Mr Hall's dissatisfaction with students proceeds from an attitude to literature which, for lack of space to demonstrate and analyse it, I must characterize briefly. It is old-fashioned in being authoritarian, in a proprietary, jealous manner that would suit a medieval craft guild, where seven years are required to make a master, arrogant journeymen are resented, and any inspired apprentice is liable to meet his Beckmesser. But literature is an art, not only a craft. This affects attitudes to the study of it as well as to the students. My experience is that teachers with the modern, more democratic approach realize this. Whatever their faults, they share the same sound view of what literature is and why it is worth studying. For instance, I can remember Professor Durrant's saying that literature is a record of human values, and the study of it "a training in human values." I and many others, not only in South Africa, agree with this; whereas Mr Hall writes as one who assumes that literature is valuable in itself apart from the students, except that it can give them delight and induce a due humility (as to how much there is of it and how little they have read). He seems afraid that students damage works of art by cutting their teeth on them.

Therefore I am uneasy in the presence of his arguments for extensive reading, progress from the general to the particular, and the mapping out of the territory in advance; not because I want to rule these out of court, but because the ultimate aim seems to be a knowledge of the corpus of English literature, an arrangement of authors in a hierarchy, and judgments, in the realm of aesthetic philosophy, about artistic merit.

To me, the aim of literary studies is an expansion of mind, spirit and imagination, which great literature may bring to those who can submit and discipline themselves to respond fully and accurately to what a great writer transmits through the medium of their own mother-tongue; and, having responded, can become conscious of the nature and value of the response. Poor though their schooling is, our better students who choose to study English for three years are sufficiently literate, honest and intelligent to do these things and experience these rewards, if they are shown the right approach, which is *through language*.

In the controversy between Professor Durrant and Mr Hall neither mentioned language study. I think that if it were given its due, Mr Hall would have less to complain of. Some of the real strength of the modern approach to English studies seems in danger of being lost: it consists in the adoption, by students of literature, of contemporary views about language, and the adaptation of techniques, evolved by linguistic philosophers, to the study of literature. To formulate the theory underlying this adaptation proved more difficult than Richards at first thought, or than Empson realizes,[2] and seems not to proceed on a straight path even in the United States; but its practical application (to which Professor Greig's teaching of Semantics made a substantial contribution) must not be abandoned. Textual analysis, properly understood and consistently applied, is a new method, allowing greater accuracy than was common in the past, for studying all uses of language, including literature; for properly responding to them, understanding them and substantiating judgments about them. Mr Hall does not realize this, and there are signs that lecturers, whose work with the 'new criticism' produces the results he so deplores, may be overlooking it also.

The importance of textual analysis is not, as Mr Hall's article suggests, that it leads up to esoteric considerations, to aesthetic judgments about form or artistic achievement, but rather that it leads down and back to what everybody has known about the communicative powers of his own language since he was a young child; but we must first show him he knows it.

This is done (readers must bear with me, whether they think I labour the obvious or dig up buried hatchets) by giving him exercises in dissecting propaganda, advertisements, metaphors, familiar idioms, simple poems—things which he understood and responded to with ease years ago. He then enjoys a process Mr Hall pictures as painful, that of "excogitating reasons" for his responses, by examining details of an art or craft not peculiar to one great writer or one highly-wrought work, but shared in common by all users of English. If what Mr Hall calls "advanced critical lines," "aesthetic experience," "artistic problems" (1 (2) p. 159, 160, 162) are stressed too early, that is not the fault of textual analysis; in due course, by its aid in testing the honesty of

[2] I tried to tackle this problem in an article 'Poetry, Language and Communication,' published in *Philosophy* (London), Vol. 30: 249-25[illegible] 1955.

responses and the cogency of arguments, it can benefit them too. Exercises with chiefly non-artistic materials soon provide an able student with a precision instrument which, if anything, is too sharp to be placed in his inexperienced hands. But remedies are near: he grows older, and in the meantime is directed to apply his instrument to Shakespeare's plays, whose complex dramatic poetry thrives on dissection, and whose created characters triumphantly survive anatomising, so that the experience of being transcended is not banished from the student's ken.

Textual analysis requires such a rigorous discipline in detecting the role of emotion and unsuspected motives in one's own use of language, and in disentangling the sensory, emotional and symbolizing components of meanings of words in given contexts, that it has a very salutary effect on mental honesty, and *does* afford students who master it (and never relapse) an armour against "intellectual, moral or aesthetic humbug." It is the best means of preventing a lecturer from imposing his judgment on students, without substantiating it or honestly meeting their objections. This imposition is undesirable, whether the judgment relates to one word in a line of contemporary poetry, or the whole output of the Victorian poets.

Part of the 'revolution' in English studies was a realization that English in the university would only escape becoming a 'soft option' if it included some mental discipline comparable to that required for philological studies. Textual analysis and its foundation in linguistic philosophy (in other words, a functional instead of a formal approach to language-study) ensure that discipline. If textual analysis is properly taught, and is practised with the due rigour demanded both by its philosophical antecedents, and by the claims of integrity and candour between lecturer and student, the modern approach to literature need fear no man's attack.

O. M. MEIDNER.

Pietermaritzburg.
12 May, 1959.

Dear Sir,

Please allow me to assure Professor Durrant that he gives altogether too personal a direction to my remarks. My only aim, as far as he was concerned, was to rebut what I considered, and still consider, some rather loose allegations about essay-type questions. (His advocacy of one substantial essay on a general literary topic does not seem to me to relieve the pressures I spoke of.) Perhaps I was guilty in not making clearly enough my transition from a specific commentary upon his remarks to some general considerations which seem to me to spring from the scrutiny-of-text principle which he asserted. Since I did not refrain from saying that I associated some undesirable consequences with the intensive or exclusive use of this method, I suppose I could have been thought to be deliberately aspersing Professor Durrant's own departmental practices—though I have, in fact, no knowledge of them, and consequently no views either to express or suppress. There is nothing eccentric about his espousal of the method; some, indeed, would call it the dominant method; and so it never occurred to me that my general remarks on a widely accepted viewpoint (even though I did use him as a springboard) could or would be read in any but a general sense. I can only give him my word that I intended nothing so invidiously personal or distasteful as he has found in it. I gain some assurance, and I hope he may, from knowing that not every reader reached his conclusions.

Among the vaguely discreditable delusions and motives imputed to me by Miss van Heyningen in a letter in the same issue of your journal, one at least I ought not allow to go by default. She writes: "I do not share Mr Hall's low opinion of the capabilities of students. Never in the world's history has intelligence been confined to teachers. . ." This gratuitously implies that I hold the student in contempt. I said nothing of innate intelligence or capacity—of which I assume our students to have a fair human share. The limitations I discussed were those of age and experience —the background of life and literature that a student brings to his reading. I contended that to try to make the words on the page yield up to the adolescent the whole of the treasure that it yields to the middle-aged reader (a worthy and understandable but dangerous attempt to make) is to overestimate the power of the written word as well as the powers and experience of the young mind. If such a contention turns one into the Beckmesser figure

so engagingly pictured by Mrs Meidner in a letter in the present issue, I shall have to reconcile myself to playing this demented role.

I really made no issue of the necessity of reading the words on the page (can anyone?) or of the refining and deepening powers of literature, so that I am at a loss to account for the tuition offered me in this respect. There is nothing "modern" (*pace* Mrs Meidner) about seeking a full and understanding response to what an author says. But response depends not only on what the author says, but on what the reader brings to the author's words. I merely argued for a tactful recognition of this fact and for advance upon a broad front as well as penetration in depth, with examinations shaped accordingly. My view was one Miss Helen Gardner expresses in her recent *The Business of Criticism;* "The young need, on the one hand, to be encouraged to read for themselves, widely, voraciously, and indiscriminately; and on the other to be helped to read with more enjoyment and understanding what their teachers have found of value."

To have read widely in an author or period is advantageous, and sometimes indispensable, when it comes to reading deeply a particular text. If our syllabuses include only what may be covered in a closely conducted tour we forfeit the necessary breadth. The student with a wide if superficial knowledge of, say, the 'Dickens world' is, I maintain, the student who is also best equipped to approach a particular Dickens novel as a 'dramatic poem'. It was in this connexion that I spoke of proceeding from the general to the particular. Perhaps I should have said 'from the simple to the complex'; though I still do not find the original phrase 'astonishing" in its context; nor, I believe, would Miss van Heyningen, had she been concerned to search out constructively our grounds of disagreement, and less anxious to smell out heresy.

I would leave Mrs Meidner's demonstration of the "modern" approach to speak for itself, were it not that silence might imply complacent assent to the wit and complexity her craft is able to unearth in a sentence of mine. Far from conveying an elaborate and ironical incredulity, the sentence is a straightforward summary of what precedes it and attempts to present the *reductio ad absurdum* of a particular line of Professor Durrant's argument. 'Gobbet" has no such high-voltage charge; the word is a quite neutral one, and common in academic usage to mean a segment of text. The manner in which she loads my every rift with ore

is pregnant with significance in the present controversy.

Having expressed regret that I may unwittingly have left room for the personal application which Professor Durrant gave to my remarks, let me add the less apologetic regret that I have so far failed to elicit any positive comment upon my main point, that of adjusting "width" and "depth" to the needs of the young student. I also regret that, having taken Professor Durrant at his word that examinations "need continual criticism and revision," he should find it possible to characterize disagreement as "shrill assertion". As for describing my background sketch of the growth of the scrutiny method as an attempt to drag into local affairs the academic politics of England, let me be quite assertive about it and say that I find the charge frivolously unwarrantable.

A. D. HALL

University of the Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg.
2 June, 1959.

(This correspondence is now closed.—Editor)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Image of the City and other essays, by Charles Williams; selected, with a critical introduction, by Anne Ridler. Oxford University Press, 1958. lxxii, 199 p. 25/-.

CHARLES WILLIAMS and Lascelles Abercrombie are two unjustly neglected critics of our time. *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* and *The Idea of Great Poetry* seem to me criticism of the kind of imaginative importance needed to offset and correct the analytical criticism or the segmentation of art that monopolize modern English studies.

Not forgetting Traherne, Williams is one of the most saintly of the English poets. In spite of his orthodox Anglicanism, he writes nobly in defence of Milton; his range of tastes shows that he owed as much to Dante and Hopkins as to Malory, Shakespeare and Wordsworth. Indeed, Williams's widening circle of admirers, growing reputation as a religious thinker, his honesty, perception and wisdom have a common source—the undivided attention he gave to the spirit of the words through which literature, and especially poetry, attains to its characteristic power of communication. As Miss Ridler justly expresses it, "he enjoyed poetry with his whole being."

Unfortunately, the criticism in Miss Ridler's selection is insufficient in bulk to confirm Williams's unique position. There is not one study, however, that does not contain some illuminating remark, or valuable correction of a critical generalization that was ill informed. Thus, in a paragraph Williams conjures up the spirit, seizes upon the strength and weakness, of an age as complex as the Victorian. Few things more cogent have been said about Macaulay, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Swinburne and George Eliot, as exemplars of Victorianism—the respect for stability, the dignity and the duty, the lack of metaphysical direction. Of Landor he writes: "He superbly withdrew himself to his art, and his art has ever since remained superbly withdrawn . . . It is very well to be humbled; it is more tiresome to be dwarfed; and there are pages of Landor where he dwarfs us with his exalted art, without humbling us by his profound and intense passion. We weary of

those halls and colonnades of style, of that solemn air of recollection and declamation."

There are two essays on Milton which deserve special attention, because they indicate how culpably mistaken some of the 'revaluers' have been in their estimate of the poet's theology, life and versification. It was the academic critics who first 'petrified' Milton by their attention to his diction and rhythm, and their insistence on his austerity and humourless domestic tyranny. Milton's mind, argues Williams, was not essentially proud, but "dove-like" and shy. Middleton Murry had expressed the unfortunate opinion that Milton was "simply, a bad man of a very particular kind." Williams shows this judgment to be incompatible with the poet's work. To understand *Paradise Lost,* it is unnecessary to go to the prose works; the key to Milton's theme is in the poem itself.

Williams suggests that too much heed has been given to Milton's Arianism and Calvinism, and too little to what *Paradise Lost* purports to convey. Its theme is 'disobedience,' the kind of obedience exacted being "self-abnegation in love." This, like the chastity of *Comus,* is a simple but sublime mystery, perfectly possible for Adam and Eve in their state of purity and innocence. But how the will works in such a state is inconceivable to the modern humanist imagination, which, like Macbeth's, asks "will I be safe?" before it opts for evil. But God, if he is omnipotent, cannot be removed, and Satan's rebellion is pusillanimous and silly. The drama of *Paradise Lost* lies "in the terror of the obstinacy" that provoked the Fall. The real temptation is not knowledge, but pride, egotism, a mistaken sense of one's own wrongs; these lead to malice, and finally to untruth and idiocy, which are Milton's conception of hell. "Satan is the Image of personal clamour for personal independence." There were, for the angels, two alternatives—to be in union with Omnipotence or to be in a state of unison only with oneself. They chose the latter. The symbolical battle is not simply a myth; it is a commonplace in contemporary human affairs. The theme of *Paradise Lost* is the struggle of man to make right choices, to preserve intact his will against the sense of "injured merit," which we all, at times, are apt to feel.

Milton realized that his pride was a weakness, and his famous opening invocation to the story of the Fall is "a prayer of humility . . . he was not proud in his approach to heaven." The

ending of *Paradise Lost* is, therefore, very different in spirit from its audacious beginning, "Warring in heaven against heaven's *matchless* king." Penitence and humility leave humanity with the expectation of better things. The final picture of Adam and Eve wending their solitary way, hand in hand, from Eden, shows that Milton was not inhuman; and this is partly due to the delicacy of his verse. It is capable of surprising tenderness and beauty. "The one thing he always denounced as sin and (equally) as folly was the self-closed 'independent' spirit." This aspect of Milton's thinking, more than anything else, makes his theology difficult for a modern audience to swallow.

There is no space to consider the essay on 'Blake and Wordsworth,' with its convincing understanding of *Jerusalem* and *The Prelude;* or the views on 'Religious Drama,' which explain its invariable failure *qua* drama. The essays on religion and theology cover a surprising range and, like Eliot's, touch directly or obliquely on the relationship of culture, religion and literary tradition. For instance, 'Sensuality and Substance' is concerned with heretics, and D. H. Lawrence in particular. It is to be remarked, however, that Williams abhors labels, which he rightly holds distract our minds from the writer's explicit purpose in the individual work.

Miss Ridler's introductory essay on Charles Williams is a well-considered complement to the commemorative study of C. S. Lewis. Williams was a Christian of profound insight, as his essays on 'The Way of Exchange' and 'The Way of Affirmation' make clear. It may be, as Miss Ridler assures us, that Williams wrote habitually for money; but so did Dr Johnson, and there is no lessening of dignity or sign of compromise in either writer's craft. If Williams wrote reviews of thrillers for the popular press, he gave his true poetic spirit to *The Seed of Adam* and *Taliessin through Logres.*

The essays on his adaptation of the Arthurian Cycle serve to illuminate Williams's symbol-loving and ritualistic cast of mind. The Dolorous Blow in the Arthurian legend is an analogue to the Biblical Fall; and Mordred, in his egotism, is the fellow of Satan. Williams regards the creation of Sir Galahad as one of the noblest literary inspirations; he is no Messiah, but represents only the human soul in quest of salvation. It is, in fact, in his capacity for this "mythical imagination" that Williams reveals himself as

a true poet. His was a unified personality that never, to his credit, confused artistic and religious issues; he maintained that "the poetic capacity for myth is quite different from the human capacity for religion; a fact not without relevance to our general belief in religion as well as our criticism of verse."

A. C. PARTRIDGE.

* * *

The Chequer'd Shade, Reflections on Obscurity in Poetry, by John Press. London, Oxford University Press, 1958. 217 p., index. 25s.

THE author, himself a poet, has been happy in the choice of his title from the fourth book of Pope's *Dunciad.* His captions for chapters are equally discriminating, commencing with Richard Hurd's dictum that "the source of bad criticism, as universally of bad philosophy, is the abuse of terms." Mr Press's own terms and explanations are usually clear and unequivocal; he sees the danger of the coterie-mongers whose Poetic insists that a poem may be beautiful as well as obscure; for generalizations above the heads of the common reader only "confirm many sensible people in their suspicion that poetry is an airy-fairy cult."

The choice of a suitable language for poetry is not one that can be easily determined; but Mr Press maintains that invariably a poet's syntax is more important than his vocabulary. One source of obscurity may be the misfortune of ambiguous or unusual punctuation and grammar. The unhelpful critics of poetry are often the academic ones who pay much regard to poetic diction, instead of to the structural mechanics of the poem. Eliot, Yeats and Graves, being poets, detect more readily than other modern critics the strength or weakness of poetic language.

Mr Press is equally perceptive when he reminds us that "no prose interpretation of poetry can have complete finality;" the obscurity it attempts to solve may even be increased by "over subtle reading," which is not as valuable as a feeling for tone or for texture. Poetry, he believes, "is less a means of communication than a way of communion." But full communion is not attainable without vital music, some technical competence in

handling the sonantal values, as well as the overtones and associations of words.

Why are the poet-innovators, who are not understood by one generation, often acceptable to, and prized by the succeeding one, he asks. Wordsworth, Keats and T. S. Eliot have been notable examples. Mr Press does not believe that the explanation lies in a quasi-biological mutation in thinking or taste; he finds it rather in the interpretative work of responsible critics—he regards interpretation as a most important part of the modern critic's function. A change in intellectual climate is rarely initiated by academic critics, but by fellow poets with a sensible grasp of the problems of articulation of the experimenters.

Mr Press's initial procedure in illustrating types of difficulty by analysing poems or excerpts is suggestive, if not always methodical. In chapters 5 to 7 he attempts to explain some reasons why obscurity has increased since the time of Browning, sometimes unconsciously, more often deliberately. He believes that lack of linguistic perception prevents the timid intellectual critics of to-day from denouncing the complexity in poetry that arises from caprice and affection. There is more chance of complexity being bogus when criticism is flaccid, even servile to pseudo-intellectual fashions.

The decline since the seventeenth century of a traditional social and religious order, and the progressive vulgarization of education, have brought "the terrifying chaos of modern life" which T. S. Eliot depicts. Mr Press likewise advances this as the major cause of modern obscurity. Eliot's verse he rightly describes as "oblique, introspective, enigmatical;" Auden's as "cryptic, satirical muttering." It is notable that Dylan Thomas himself found that the reading of his own and other men's poems made him aware of the necessity of greater clarity in writing. The obscure poem cannot be vocally interpreted, either with significant emotion or intellectual understanding.

Mr Press maintains that we allow to pass muster too much formal incompetence and moral looseness of expression. The literary conscience has been sapped by the usury of public approbation, a tragedy of craftsmanship particularly observable in America.

Modern poetry crystallizes symbols, rather than incorporates

figures. It holds that the reader of the past three hundred years has been too much enslaved by the dominance of visual images. Among the most characteristic changes in poetry of the last generation has been the abolition of narrative and logic, though Yeats tried desperately to resist it. Mr Press enquires whether these changes have been salutary or otherwise. Do abrupt transitions and often disjointed imagery really hit off the incoherence and speed of modern life? Does a lively, informal, conversational tone inhibit the feared logical exposition and codified syntax?

Mr Press thinks that the power of symbolist theory has restricted the appeal of poetry. Modern theories involve too many distractions from the main purpose of poetry, what Coleridge described as its "passionate flow." Coleridge foresaw that to sacrifice this flow to the "subtleties of intellect" would result in a poetic sport "half of image, and half of abstract meaning." If meaning is merely the burglar's piece of meat for the house-dog, it is bound in the end to be regarded as nearly superfluous.

Mr Press suggests that the poet, as maker, is a trinity: he insinuates the trend of meaning by his musical properties; he fascinates by casting images upon the visual imagination; he controls the "dance of the intellect among words." If for no other reason than that he supplements his argument with a valuable anthology of views on the purpose, means, function and ideals of poetry, Mr Press is worth following to the end of his rather inconclusive thesis. For, indeed, the final word on poetry can never be said.

But more important things have been said about poetry in the last thirty years than in any generation since that of Wordsworth and Coleridge. These two came, as a breath of fresh air, at the end of a long period of experimentation, when the eighteenth century had been testing the nature and strength of language as an instrument of rationalization. The generation to which Eliot gave birth has been experimenting with figures that do not shrink from by-passing the conscious intellect. Dylan Thomas's description of his method of composing a poem is reminiscent of Hegelian dialectic; but it uses images to determine the pattern in the place of logical thought. We may be on the eve of semantic discoveries in the nature and purpose of language as important as the changes adumbrated in physics. Poetry, we now believe, is a key to the

philosophy of speech; not a luxury study, but a discipline irreplaceable for the dignity of language, in an age when prose is debased by journalism to the needs of a utilitarian world.

A. C. PARTRIDGE

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English Critical Essays: Twentieth Century. Second Series. Selected and introduced by Derek Hudson. Oxford University Press, 1958. [xvil, 363 p. (The World's Classics), 7s.

THIS collection of twenty-eight essays, all published since 1933, is complementary to *English Critical Essays: Twentieth Century,* selected by Phyllis Jones and published in that year. It is intended for the general reader rather than the specialist, and its object is "to display a selection of the best English criticism of the last twenty-five years." With the exception of two essays—Raymond Mortimer on 'Balzac,' and Sir Harold Nicolson on 'Leconte de Lisle'—the essays are primarily concerned with English literature. There are five essays of a general nature: T. S. Eliot on 'The Frontiers of Criticism,' Charles Morgan on 'Creative Imagination,' Sir Maurice Bowra on 'Poets and Scholars,' Lord David Cecil on 'The Fine Art of Reading,' and Stephen Spender on 'Inside the Cage: Reflections on Conditioned and Unconditioned Imagination.' Mr Hudson has aimed at a selection of essays that illustrates writers who are the best suited for their particular jobs; he regrets in his Introduction that he has been unable to include an essay by I. A. Richards. The reader will also regret the omission, from both this and the earlier collection, of essays by Yeats, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis and T. E. Hulme.

That the critics included represent different generations, and cover years which have seen "drastic changes in taste and mental outlook," is immediately manifest from a comparison of the styles of the first and last essays. The volume opens with Harold Child on 'J. M. Barrie as Dramatist,' and closes with a review by John Wain of the *Collected Poems* of Dylan Thomas. "Barrie himself," says Mr Child, "was bothered by the stubbornness of ideas that declined to wear pretty clothes he arranged upon their ungainly or repulsive forms, putting, as someone phrased it, a wreath of roses . . . on a skull." "Religion," says Mr Wain, "seems to me

Thomas's worst pitch; he never succeeds in making me feel that he is doing more than thumbing a lift from it." The volume thus opens with Child on Barrie on children, and closes with Wain on Thomas in *The White Giant's Thigh.*

Charles Morgan and Stephen Spender are both represented by essays on the imagination. For Morgan the Imagination is still Creative; for Spender it is either Conditioned or Unconditioned, and languishes unhappily at present "inside the cage." Fundamentally the writers are in agreement: Spender holds that some form of religious belief is the indispensable foundation of the unconditioned imagination; for Morgan "the impulse to creative imagination is . . . in one form or another, ecstatic." But, whereas Spender is convinced that he and his contemporaries inhabit a waste land, Morgan appears to have lived when, as in prayer, the poet could still "lay open his heart . . . to permit the Supreme Spirit to enter and ravish him," and when dwarfs still had hunchbacks.

The anti-Romantic trend of this century seems to have done the younger poets and critics a disservice. (For this reason, if for no other, Yeats ought to have been represented; for Yeats alone in this century was possessed of a unique and distinguished prose style.) Diffusion and indecision are characteristic of the younger critics. Hardly a writer since 1920 but has been preoccupied with questions of theory, both in his criticism and his creation.

It is significant that Eliot is represented by his essay on 'The Frontiers of Criticism.' That essay confirms me in the opinion that, under the toughness and tenacity of the generation born before the turn of the century, was concealed a not inconsiderable measure of Romantic subterfuge. "If you would hear the Muse," says Morgan, quoting George Moore, "you must prepare silent hours for her;" and he continues—"They must be not silent only, but submissive. You must not question her or be impatient of her absence." Suffering ravishment with Morgan, admonition with Eliot, and imprisonment with Spender, I was reminded of the judgment passed on Thomas Gray by Samuel Johnson: "he had a notion . . . that he could not write but at certain times, or at happy moments; a fantastick foppery."

Mr Hudson is to be commended for displaying something of the diversity, as well as the fragmentariness, of much of the criticism of the past thirty years. There is a rather obscure note by Edwin

Muir on Robert Henryson; one by Edmund Blunden on 'Country Poets'; a good introduction to Sir Thomas Browne by Basil Willey; Cyril Connolly on Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris;* and a scholarly but confusing essay by William Empson on *The Spanish Tragedy*. Miss Naomi Lewis on 'A Visit to Mrs Wilcox' is a revelation to young people whose parents did not win school prizes. The prizes won were often volumes of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, presumably because they were well bound. Having read this essay, the reader can even forgive Henry James for becoming a European.

JOHN SAPERSTEIN.

* * *

Modern English Prose (Fourth Series), selected and edited by Guy Boas. Macmillan, 1959. 201 p. and notes. 5s.

THIS little book is good value; it contains twenty-eight extracts, ranging from one thousand to four thousand words. All are written since 1900, most since 1945. The notes give the dates of each author, but not those of the books from which the extracts are made. There is some highly interesting material: Hillary's own description of the conquest of Everest; the moment of impact between the iceberg and the Titanic; Bannister's four-minute mile; the Duke of Edinburgh's review of British science made before the British Association in 1951. Especially memorable are Priestley on television (from *Thoughts in the Wilderness*), Bertrand Russell on the prospects of science (from *New Hopes for a Changing World*), G. M. Durrell's character of a chimpanzee (from *The Overloaded Ark*), and David Attenborough on the volcanoes of Java (from *Zoo Quest for a Dragon*).

There is plenty of scope among these pieces for comparison and discussion, and the book would make an excellent teaching manual. The organization of good prose can be watched in the artifice of Richard Church, in the operational clarity of Colonel Burne's account of Caesar's campaign in Britain, and in the effortless lucidity of Bertrand Russell. For texture there is homespun Orwell, art-silk Fleming, journalistic tinsel from Walter Lord, Churchillian bombazeen, Stracheyan damask. The feebleness of Bannister's account will show that heroes are not automatically writers. Hillary

is far more exciting, but it would seem that the only way to get prose worthy of these epic moments is to put our young Lytton Stracheys into track-suits and oxygen masks.

Finally, there is bad prose as well as good. Five extracts are on science and they are given pride of place in the book. Three, by a philosopher, a prince and a polymath respectively, are admirable. Two extracts (and these the first in the book) from writings on space are crude. It is valuable to see that the discipline of science, like that of the track, is not automatically transferable into the discipline of language, which Bertrand Russell here calls "the most important single factor in the development of a man."

I hope it is not churlish in such a rewarding book to suggest that, on page 74, "effect" (Four-Minute Mile, line 2) should read "effort," and on page 154, "historian" should be "histrion."

P. C. BIRKINSHAW.

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